THE TALE OF PROGRESS

A Study on the Idea of Progress in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Critical Theory

by
Giuseppe Tassone

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Department of Politics
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ABSTRACT

Philosophies of history, with their wide-ranging speculations on the overall course of the historical development, have lost credibility under the existentialist and post-modern attacks against totality thinking. An illustrious casualty of the latter's deconstructive practice is the idea of progress. Elevated during the Enlightenment to the quasi-idolatric status of symbol of the dynamic and future oriented traits of modernity, this idea has increasingly faded away from the process of self-understanding of modern consciousness in the face of the moral ambiguity taken on by science and technology.

This thesis challenges the current general mood of disillusionment of belief in progress. By confronting the 'nihilistic' - Nietzsche and Heidegger - and the 'utopian' - Ad orno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse - critiques of progress, it pursues a revitalization of the humanist tradition. It argues that Nietzsche and Heidegger, in spite of their repudiation of the concept of totality, remain anchored to an idea of totalized modernity which reproduces the theoretical pattern of radical philosophy of history. In this respect, it contends that the philosophies of history of these two authors can be generally regarded as 'progressive', although the ideals they advocate are of a different mould from those of the Enlightenment.

However, against Nietzsche and Heidegger, the thesis embraces - after criticizing Adorno's and Horkheimer's negative dialectic - Marcuse's materialist-dialectical framework accounting for a new technological society based upon the values of freedom, justice, equality, happiness, and beauty. It argues also that the accomplishment of this utopian project does not require us to abandon science and reason. The thesis does not offer a definitive argument to establish the superiority of the utopian account of the historical totality as opposed to the nihilistic one, although it rejects the relativist assertion that all validity claims are equivalent. But, since philosophies of history imply the task of passing value judgements on the course of historical events, the thesis claims that, ultimately, insights into a better way of life transcending 'the bad current state of humanity' can find their truth only in historical action and in the struggle of humanity to overcome suffering.

To my parents

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to explain the crisis of modernity in the light of the critiques raised to the idea of progress from the divergent standpoints of nihilism and Critical Theory. The most widespread studies of the relationship between modernity and belief in progress regard the latter as a sort of secularized view of history which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries out of earlier philosophic-historical formulations. What has since then grounded the historians' total reconstructions of the historical process, these analyses suggest, is an indubitable faith in progress, i.e. in the teleological movement of history towards an end-point. Indeed, throughout its unfolding, history has displayed a series of extraordinary accomplishments capable on their own of substantiating the underlying faith in the magnificent destiny towards which humanity was believed to be heading. The development of knowledge, science, and technology has expanded material welfare, thus allowing the improvement of social and political institutions, the effectiveness of moral norms, and the refinement of aesthetic taste. However, all these analyses agree in recognizing that in recent decades the entire framework incorporating the idea of progress has come into question and that the doctrine of progress has been widely rejected. Disillusionment with progress is related to the fact that breakthroughs in science and technology have become morally ambiguous, since man's increasing understanding and control over nature have assumed the shape of a manipulative and potentially destructive power. The outcome of this line of thought is not uniform: some diagnoses claim that the fading of our confidence in the idea of progress is ineluctable, especially considering that religion, upon which faith in progress is believed to be ultimately grounded, is inexorably declining; other interpretations maintain the validity of the idea of progress, though admitting that it cannot be retained without providing a new set of ethical criteria assumed to be compelling obligations in the course of history.

But where does this presumed ethical authority reside whose viewpoint entitles it to dictate universal norms of moral action? Here is the point where modernity displays its close link with the concept of progress - such a pervasive one, the latter, in the history of modernity, that it might be almost identified with modernity itself. The crisis

of modernity is precisely the coming into question of the notion of truth as "objective" or "scientific" truth which can be proved through some kind of procedural reasoning.

Renunciation of objective truth involves the abandonment of the epistemological relationship between subject and object. Philosophical literature tends to trace back to Descartes's *Metaphysical Meditations* in order to uncover the original source of modernity. There Descartes seeks to give reasons for the subject-object relationship. How can, he wonders, a given subject enclosed in itself go out of itself to reach a given object? This question is destined to be left unanswered until unshakable grounds of logical and empirical evidence are revealed to discursive thought. To this purpose, Descartes drew on the *ego cogito,* Kant on the transcendental deduction of the categories, and Husserl on transcendental-phenomenological subjectivity. It was Nietzsche, instead, considered along with Heidegger as having opened up the crisis of modernity, who, by proclaiming that God is dead, affirmed that there are no longer foundations of rational thought and that all claims to truth cannot be justified from transcendental or divine standpoints. The task that, according to Nietzsche, is left to contemporary philosophy is therefore a nihilistic one, which consists in dissolving truth into value and unmasking the normative moral judgements as human beliefs and opinions or, in late Nietzsche's terms, as a manifestation of the will to power. In this nihilistic perspective even the rationality embodied in the logical structures of discursive thought - whether philosophical or scientific - is considered to be an expression of the will to power whose systems of explanation should be contemplated within the horizon of rhetoric and persuasion.

Insofar as the concept of progress defines the identity of modernity, the fading of our confidence in the idea of progress marks the crisis of modernity. According to Loewith, the concept of progress is rooted in the Jewish-Christian idea of salvation. This has been subjected to a process of secularization during the Enlightenment, thus taking on the features of a movement forward in which things steadily get better. What distinguishes the secularized view of history from the previous providential formulations is that, whereas the latter located the place of emancipation of humanity in a transcendent and historical realm, the former confines the kingdom of heaven to the world of history. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger are regarded to have been against the idea of progress. Nietzsche is said to have considered progress as just one of the many myths included among the ascetic ideals whose roots in the will to power should be

unmasked by deconstructive thought. Heidegger, on his behalf, believed that technological civilization is the culmination of Western metaphysics, for it embodies within its formal and logical structure the objectivizing essence of metaphysical thought. In a certain sense, Heidegger contends, the technological era has unfolded in a brutal and dismaying way the inner tendencies of rational metaphysics - preliminarily identified with humanism - towards a manipulative control of human beings. The capacity of science to formulate general laws has made possible rational predictions of not only natural events but also of human behaviour, thus revealing the values of humanism as potentially de-humanising. Secularization and progress, according to Heidegger, have paved the way for the decline of humanism, and this defines precisely the crisis of modernity. In other words, the crisis of modernity is, for Heidegger, the logical and necessary outcome of rationalistic metaphysics which is at the core of humanism.

The challenge facing this thesis lies in the possibility of reviving the Enlightenment idea of progress in a disenchanted world without religion and metaphysics. The philosophers of the Frankfurt School -Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse - though acknowledging Weber's negative dialectics of progress as long as it spells out the actual dynamic of modern industrial society pointing to the affirmation of formal and instrumental rationality, are not willing to submit themselves to the seemingly ineluctable logic of modernization. Weber's contribution to the analysis of modernity is designed to show that the historical process of rationalization of the world, as it has been advocated by the philosophers of Enlightenment, far from creating autonomous individuals, has imprisoned modern humanity, in Habermas's jargon, within depersonalized and bureaucratized subsystems of cultural discourse and social interaction. Moreover, there is for Weber an internal logical relationship between rationalization - in the sense of the affirmation of formal, purposive, and discursive rationality aiming at organizing within a systematic order the chaotic manifold of human experience - and Enlightenment. The normative idea of reason grounding the process of emancipation of consciousness from the obscurities of religious narrative has led, in Weber's view, to the emergence of a disenchanted consciousness institutionalized in secularized subsystems which reproduce in a reified form the inhibitions and restrictions of the old self-deceived religious consciousness.

Adorno and Horkheimer contend a more emphatic conception of reason

encompassing the ideas of freedom, justice, and happiness. On the assumption that the dialectics of progress has taken the negative path of the disenchanted world to be surrendered to the desacralized and disillusioned activities of scientific objectivity, they believe that the liberated society can no longer be thought of as the immanent result of the internal evolution of modern capitalist society. A revolutionary act is needed in order to break the destructive dialectics of progress and establish a realm of freedom. However, depending upon an act of radical discontinuity rather than on the continuity of the historical process, the alternative of liberated society is projected into a utopian perspective. From this vantage point, it comes to appear as a negative counter image postulated beyond history while history points in the opposite direction towards a rationalized system of reified institutions inducing the repression of individual consciousness. What makes the perspective of liberated society an abstract ideal unlikely to be achieved is the evidence that the modern process of rationalization does not merely involve the systematization and bureaucratization of politics, morality, universal law, and scientific objectification of the world, but extends its influence also to the reification of consciousness. In such a rationalized world so pervasively permeated by discursive thought, Adorno believes that only the work of art, by means of its aesthetic synthesis, can prefigure a world of authentic rational order.

At this stage, the confrontation between the two interpretations of modernity I am concerned with - the 'nihilistic' and the 'utopian' ones - seems to face an impasse. This is determined by the fact that their respective discourses on human progress cannot be reconciled. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger, on the one hand, and Adorno and Horkheimer, on the other hand, launch radical and devastating attacks on modernity but from different perspectives. To recognize the nihilistic critique leads to an individualistic overcoming; to embrace the utopian one leads to a total but abstract liberation. In confronting them, I probably pay an excessive tribute to Nietzsche's and Heidegger's contributions to contemporary thought. It is my persuasion that, after their philosophical reflection, everyone who wants to embark on the task of penetrating the most entangled features of modernity can no longer ignore their attacks against Western metaphysics and ascetic ideals. Yet, it should be considered that the most immediate implications resulting from deconstructing and dismantling modern reason lie in the danger of plummeting into an uncontrollable and potentially apocalyptic irrationalism.

To be sure, in this thesis I tell a different story of Nietzsche and Heidegger. This is mainly a thesis on philosophy of history and I argue that these two champions of nihilistic thought possess a dialectical theory of Western history designed to take man out of modernity. If the surface of their suggestive and metaphorical language flows with the vocabulary of relativism and perspectivism, I demonstrate that the substance of their thought speaks of a teleological order in the course of Western history which contains all features of those grandiose metanarratives that their postmodern followers so eagerly despise. On the basis of this argument, I claim that both Nietzsche and, to a certain degree, Heidegger can be regarded as 'progressive thinkers', regardless of whether the humanity they envisage as an alternative to the current decadent one is desirable or not.

There is no theory of progress without a philosophy of history. Therefore, in order to advocate against Nietzsche and Heidegger the Enlightenment ideals of human liberation and emancipation, I suggest to embrace Marcuse's materialist-dialectical framework of historical totalization. Many reasons could be adduced for this move and I hope that the thesis will bring them to light. However, since a philosophy of history necessarily undertakes the task of passing value judgements on the course of historical events, I believe that ultimately only moral arguments can establish why one account should be preferred to the other.

The thesis unfolds in the following manner. Chapter I introduces the current state of the debate on the idea of progress by offering an account of the controversy between Loewith and Blumenberg concerning the issue of the legitimacy of the modern age. I argue that Blumenberg's eagerness to contest Loewith's secularization thesis brings him to neglect the redeeming pathos implicit in the idea of progress, a pathos which the philosophies of history he criticizes carry with them. To what extent this pathos shapes the modern effort for self-realization is revealed by the uneasiness with which modern man takes on himself his own destiny once he has got rid of God. Emblematic of this attitude is Rousseau, and to his incapacity to come to terms with historical time I devote chapter II.

In chapter III, I enter the central core of the thesis. Here I begin the confrontation of the nihilistic and utopian perspectives on progress by examining Nietzsche's radical appropriation of the historical and temporal finitude of human essence. I contend that Nietzsche possesses a philosophical system which I claim can be understood within a

hermeneutic-ontological framework. This, in turn, can be used to explain his philosophy of history and his dialectical account of the history of Western civilization. Nietzsche identifies a quasi-teleological pattern in Western history leading from the decline of the master type to the overman via the affirmation of the slave type. To the figure of the sovereign individual he appeals to in order to overcome the age of nihilism chapter IV is devoted.

In chapter V I turn to the other champion of the anti-Enlightenment thought: Heidegger. I argue that he, too, reads Western history in dialectical terms as a sequence of logically necessary stages starting with the digression from the path of Being occurred in the metaphysical systems of Plato and Aristotle and culminating in the age of technology. The understanding of the phenomenon of technology as an all-pervasive feature of modernity in which the entire history of metaphysics and of the forgetfulness of Being converges represents the major legacy of Heidegger's philosophical speculation within Critical Theory. However, more important for the philosophers of the Frankfurt School than Heidegger's contribution is Max Weber's analysis of Enlightenment, through whose mediation they seek to explain the idea of progress. On Max Weber's reading of modernity in terms of progressive rationalization of the religious worldviews and of the process of disenchantment of the world I focus in chapter VI.

Chapter VII inaugurates the analysis of the utopian perspective on the idea of progress. I examine Adorno's and Horkheimer's dialectic of Enlightenment and present their theories of human civilization. Although I acknowledge the validity of the tool of negative dialectic in providing a critical stance against the most destructive manifestations of progress, I contend that this conceptual instrument does not offer a positive insight into the idea of what progress ought to be. In this chapter, I also reject Marcuse's utopian vision of man's liberation as it is envisaged in *Eros and Civilization* on the ground that it is based upon a merely biological account of human nature. This criticism of Marcuse is however provisional since in chapter VIII I turn to his analysis of technological rationality and fully embrace his claims in favour of the liberating and emancipatory potential of technology. I arrive at this outcome through a criticism of Simpson's quasi-Habermasian theory of technological progress and a defence, via Feenberg's theory of technology, of Marcuse's materialist-dialectical framework for social theory and historical totalization.

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THE LOEWITH-BLUMENBERG DEBATE

I. The Terms of the Debate: Progress *and* Eschatology or Progress *versus* Eschatology?

The earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 did not only destroy that beautiful capital city but also put abruptly before the consciousness of human finitude the optimism of the Enlightenment from which the modern idea of progress can be made to initiate. As a result of that catastrophe, derision of the providential design in history became more widespread and popular than the irony of Voltaire's Candide. 'What can man do before nature, death, the ineluctable, and God?' was the existential question universally raised at that time.

Progress and reaction, delirium of omnipotence and consciousness of human finitude have not only confronted each other but also intertwined in the culture of modernity. Voltaire already knew it when he mocked the naivety of the Enlightenment and broke into pieces the blessed stupidity of the anti-Enlightenment. 'We must attend to our garden', admonishes Candide at the conclusion of Voltaire's brilliant tale when Pangloss explains to him how dangerous human ambitions are. 'We must attend to our garden' is repeated again by Candide when Pangloss draws the inference that we live in the best possible world and that not every evil comes to harm. But, yes, it must be that evil comes to harm; and, no, we do not live in the best possible world. Our destiny, Candide means by his elliptical sentence, needs to be ploughed and transformed like the earth.

A little dose of Voltaire's caution is probably necessary against both the modern, over-optimistic, rationalist interpretation of Providence, on the one hand, and the post-modern, self-complacent decline into the play of chance, on the other. It is not clear, however, whether such a moderate attitude is consistent. The problem associated with the attempt to cut a middle ground between a conception of human life defined by the buoyant belief in progress as the steamroller of history and a 'non-progressive' mode of existence, is that it deprives the original concept of certain constitutive features the absence of which disassembles its meaning. Does the notion of progress make sense without the messianic thrust of the Jewish and Christian eschatology? Can it still be preserved once it has

assimilated within its own semantic lymph a dispassionate ease in the world? Is the idea of progress compatible with a suspension or neutralization of the passions of fear and hope which rule human life and constantly hint at the possibility of happiness?

It is the urgency of these dilemmas lurking behind the chasm overoptimistic expectations-sense of human finitude that sets the scene for the contemporary debate on the idea of progress. The debate was prompted by Loewith's publication of the book *Meaning in History* in 1949. The aim of this book is to disclose the lineage of the modern philosophies of history, with their celebration of progress, in the theological Christian-Judaic tradition. Loewith claims that all philosophies of history are dependent - in their interpretation of universal history as a succession of historical events leading towards an end point - upon 'the theological concept of history as a history of fulfilment and salvation.'[1] As R. M. Wallace points out, Loewith relies upon Hegel's substitution for divine providence of the 'cunning of reason' as the universal force working behind the backs of the historical agents to put forward his own derivationist thesis.[2] By seizing upon Hegel's positing of an ultimate rational design of the world which drives world-historical individuals towards a transcending purpose beyond their own intentions, Loewith reproduces the same theoretical pattern to argue that the modern idea of progress carries forward the Christian idea of salvation in secularized form. In spite of his Hegelian appropriation, however, Loewith restrains himself from suggesting that the transformation of the eschatological idea of salvation into the modern idea of progress takes place through a sequence of dialectical or necessary stages. His explanatory device is vaguely genealogical. He singles out the idea of progress as a complex unit and sets for himself the task of analytically reducing the compound into its original elements by tracing both the nearest and most remote sources of its formation. The validity of the whole project depends upon a fundamental assumption, which is that any interpretation of history is motivated by 'the basic experience of evil and suffering, and of man's quest for happiness.'[3] Human suffering is the real stuff of history, and antiquity, Christianity, and modern philosophies of history are confronted with this substantial fact of existence when they engage in the question of the meaning of historical action.

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[1] Cf. K. Loewith, *Meaning in History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1949.

[2] Cf. R. M. Wallace, "Progress, Secularization, and Modernity: The Loewith-Blumenberg Debate", in *New German Critique*, 1989, n. 22, pp. 63-79, p. 65.

[3] Cf. K. Loewith, *Meaning in History*, cit., p. 3.

Given that suffering is a constant in man's life, there is no progressive development leading to its elimination but only different interpretations of the same fact. Actually, the idea that evil could be suppressed from the world is for Loewith a modern illusion into which neither antiquity nor Christianity ever indulged. The ancients did not conceive of historical time as a linear process carrying with it a perspective which sees history as a realm of human endeavour and progress pointing towards a future fulfilment within historical existence. Such a secular transformation of Christian eschatology[4] is also a long way from the religious faith in an imminent collapse of the world. For the founders of the Christian religion, the meaning of history is not fulfilled at the culmination of a process of historical happenings but through the absolute event of the appearance of Jesus Christ. In their conception, the indifferent passage of time acquires historical significance at a particular instant of its course. When the episode of the advent of Jesus Christ occurs, a new, qualitatively distinctive, temporal horizon opens in which the past is seen as preparation for a future redemption. In the scheme of the history of salvation, the ultimate meaning of history is a time of consummation which delivers the human creature from sin and death. As such, the *eschaton* of history is a unique, transcendent event breaking into the continuity of the natural course of history and dismantling its hopeless trajectory.

According to Loewith, modern historical consciousness, while discarding the Christian faith in an absolute event of redemption and liberation, has preserved the temporal structure of the history of salvation, thus articulating historical time in terms of a teleological progression of past preparations and future fulfilment. The outcome of this secular transformation is a hybrid situation suspended between Christianity and the overcoming of Christianity:

> The modern world is as Christian as it is un-Christian because it is the outcome of an age-long process of secularization. Compared with the pagan world before Christ, which was in

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[4] I use loosely in this context the expression "Christian eschatology" without distinguishing between the plurality of meanings which it takes on in the tradition of the Christian community. However, while acknowledging Bultmann's qualification that the Old Testament does not contain an understanding of eschatology as the doctrine of the end of the world and that the latter appears only in the New Testament with different connotations across the books of St. Paul, St. John, and the Acts of the Apostles, I assume that there is a general sense in which one can speak of "Christian eschatology". It denotes the thought of the destruction of the world combined with imaginative speculations about the succeeding time of salvation. Bultmann himself employs the notion of eschatology with a unitary meaning so as to be able to interpret idealism, materialism, and belief in progress as secularized versions of its underlying teleological view of history. Cf. R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, The Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1957.

> all its aspects religious and superstitious and therefore a suitable object of Christian apologetics, our modern world is worldly and irreligious and yet dependent on the Christian creed from which it is emancipated. The ambition to be "creative" and the striving for a future fulfilment reflect the faith in creation and consummation, even when these are held to be irrelevant myths.[5]

In other terms, Loewith describes the condition of modernity as a theoretically inconsistent abode suspended between the rationality of the classical view of time as a circular movement and the irrationality of the Christian conception of historical time as a linear progression. While rejecting the Christian belief in an eschatological outcome of history, the modern mind preserves the classical idea of an endless and continuous movement, but within a linear, not circular, trajectory.[6] In this respect, its standing is contradictory since the endless continuity of the historical process implies a circular, not linear, movement, with a beginning and an end.

Loewith claims that, by indulging in the hope of a better world in the future, modernity gives itself over to a blind and deceptive feeling of expectation and disregards the sober, classic view of human existence as a continuous repetition of the same pattern, a view wisely skeptical of any eschatological futurism.

Blumenberg rejects Loewith's interpretation of the idea of progress as a secularized version of the Christian eschatology. In his view, what differentiates the modern from the Christian interpretation of history is the principle according to which historical transformation originates from within history and not from outside. He begins his analysis by examining the category of secularization. When we say, he argues, that 'the world work ethic is a secularized monastic asceticism' or that 'the world revolution is the secularized expectation of the end of the world', we apparently mean the retrieval of the worldly dimension of our existence which went lost in the theological flight from the world during the Middle Ages.[7] However, Blumenberg contends that the categorial dichotomy worldliness-unwordliness does not capture the significance of the expression. He offers two reasons for this: firstly, he argues that there is no evidence that the pre-Christian age was an epoch of worldliness in which the world "belonged" to the individuals who inhabited it. Secondly, he reminds us that, when the modern man got rid of all theological and

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[5] Cf. K. Loewith, ibid., p. 201.

[6] Cf. K. Loewith, ibid., p. 207.

[7] Cf. H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, p. 4.

metaphysical illusions, he did not gain the certainty of the world. On the contrary, he was even more alienated from it than before. Mathematical physics exposed the unreliability of his senses and showed that the world he experienced was a superficial and deceitful manifestation of a more substantial reality.[8]

On the basis of these considerations, it follows for Blumenberg that, when 'secularization' is given as a category of interpretation of the historical process, it is assumed that there is a substance in history undergoing qualitative transformations whose dynamic can be understood by relating each moment to what preceded it. But, according to him, historical substantialism, that is the thesis that there are substantial constants in history, cannot be demonstrated.

Yet, there is a further implication in the secularization thesis clearly spelled out by Loewith. The claim that the modern world is the result of a process of secularization of Christianity is made by analogy with the process of expropriation of church properties carried out in the age of Enlightenment. The suggestion implicit in this claim is that modern rationality is enveloped in the conceptual framework of theology and that its alleged discontinuity with the past is merely ideological. As a consequence, modernity's claim to deliver man from dependence on external religious attributes and to recognize reason as the only source of legitimation of ethical and cognitive claims turns out to be illegitimate.

Blumenberg contends that there is a flaw in this explanation. It does not say whether the detachment of ideas and thoughts from the religious universe in which they originally arose was spontaneous or was carried out by some external agent. Such an ambiguity is not irrelevant, but is a constitutive part of the process through which the concept of secularization was conjured up as an explanatory category of history.

Blumenberg, too, underlines that Loewith relies upon Hegel's category of inversion in order to ground the genesis of the linear conception of history in the eschatological teleology. According to Loewith, Hegel interpreted the appearance of modern historical consciousness as the dialectical reversal of the idea of Providence. Within his monological view of history as the process of self-realization of reason, the modern vindication of subjective freedom seems to be the logically necessary outcome of the internalization of the idea of God. Now, Blumenberg argues that Loewith employs instrumentally Hegel's

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[8] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 8.

concept of history in order to disclose the illegitimacy of the linear historical consciousness. In his view, Loewith's intent is to bring together the Christian story of salvation and the modern idea of progress and, via the secularization theorem, read them as two aspects of the same phenomenon. As a consequence, both appear to result from an epochal break with the cyclical cosmology of antiquity.

From the way in which Blumenberg understands it, Loewith's project is to reconstitute the pagan doctrine of cosmos and 'its cyclical structure of security'[9] which were illegitimately abandoned in favour of the biblical unilinear temporality. In this light, progress turns out to be a fate, the inevitable outcome of an original diversion that occurred at the end of antiquity. Blumenberg, on the contrary, wants to deny the existence of a genetic nexus between the eschatological idea of salvation and the historical idea of progress. He argues that, since the idea of salvation refers to a transcendent event breaking into history from outside and interrupting its continuity while the idea of progress consists of the projection onto an immanent future of a pattern of historical movement constantly pushing forward, the former cannot provide a model for the latter. In his view, the idea of progress results instead from the generalization of a series of experiences which over a long period of time develop into something new. Blumenberg offers the phenomenon of science as an example of human enterprise in which novel experiences are historically produced. Thanks to their methodological unity, scientific theories evolve across time 'independently of individuals and generations.' [10] From their success, hopes of a better future arise. Eschatological expectations, instead, do not spring from hope but from fear and terror before the sheer insecurity of man in the world. If this is the case, then the idea of progress as the belief in the possibility of a constant improvement of man's situation in this world must have emerged precisely in opposition to and not in continuity with the other-worldly possibilities envisaged by eschatology.

Blumenberg identifies the origin of the idea of progress in the idea of method. The idea of progress borrows from the scientific method the notion of a regulative organization of human actions. As the scientific activity proceeds by integrating theoretical achievements within a coherent pattern of knowledge, in the historical world the belief arises that human events and actions can be similarly ordered within a rational scheme. The

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[9] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 28.

[10] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 31.

idea of method requires man to take responsibility for his own destiny and become the only maker of history. It assumes that no plan of salvation is involved in the project of theoretical domination of nature, but 'the disposition of the subject... to take part in a process that generates knowledge in a transsubjective manner.'[11]

According to Blumenberg, if the idea of progress has hyperbolized into the idea of infinite progress and taken on divine attributes in the context of the philosophy of history, it is because of the failure of modern science to fulfil the expectations of theoretical and practical completion. When it became clear that methodical research was a never-ending enterprise whose results were always incomplete and liable of revision, individuals became resigned to the thought of being involved in a practice whose products would be enjoyed by future generations and not by themselves. Still, though hyperbolized, Blumenberg believes that the idea of progress played an emancipatory function since it rendered the notion of the absolute irrelevant and made human history bearable and meaningful. By standing as a regulative principle of men's activities, it gave sense and direction to their dealings.

In other words, the argument that Blumenberg puts forward to confute the secularization thesis consists in showing that the dimension of future and hope opened up by the idea of progress is not comparable to messianic expectations. The latter were never attractive but expressed a mere negation of fears and visions of downfall. The idea of progress emerges instead when, following eschatological disappointment for the postponement of the end of the world, the world is released from the spell of otherworldly expectations and, as it were, recreated as the abode of human self-assertion.

As mentioned above, Blumenberg's narrative separates the formation of the idea of progress from the appearance in modernity of abstract speculations about the totality of history. In his view, philosophical reflection on the content of the overall future constitutes an over-extension of the limited range of functionality of the idea of progress. To the extent that the philosophy of history reproduces the pattern of salvation story and attempts to answer questions about the totality of history, it takes upon itself the burden of problems posed by the Middle Ages and offers new solutions more appropriate to a post-medieval age. However, the modern reformulation of medieval questions does not justify for Blumenberg the secularization thesis, since it is a characteristic of any historical period to

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[11] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 33.

inherit questions from the most recent past and give them new answers. Thus, speculation of philosophy of history on the historical totality represents a 'reoccupation' of the ground of eschatology not by reinterpreting it but by manipulating the 'independently generated idea of progress'[12] and extending its application beyond the limits of what is accessible to theoretical methodology. What differentiates the category of secularization from that of reoccupation is then for Blumenberg the fact that, while the former presupposes the permanence of ideal substances across time - namely, the theological substance of eschatology - the latter sees the continuity of history in terms of the inheritance of problems whereby successive epochs are obliged 'to know again what was known once before.'[13]

Related to Blumenberg's criticism of the modern philosophies of history is the thesis that theodicy is a form of secularization of theology.[14] While theology was being caught up, the thesis asserts, in the dilemma of reconciling God's omnipotence and goodness with the existence of evil, theodicy came to its rescue by attributing to human wickedness the responsibility of all that which is bad in the world. Underlying the explanation of theodicy is the assumption that man is predisposed both to bad and good actions and endowed with freedom of choice. According to this thesis, theodicy represents already a first level of secularization of theology because, out of concern for relieving God of responsibility for the bad in the world, it turns theology into an anthropology of the instinctual and moral life. Now, to the extent that this thesis brings with it the implication that philosophy of history, through the mediation of theodicy of which it is a more refined form, is the continuation of theology, Blumenberg contends that there is no identity of theodicy and philosophy of history. In fact, whereas theodicy begins with the presupposition of man's autonomy in order to preserve God's absolute goodness, philosophy of history posits human freedom as a goal and an end to be achieved in the course of history. What, according to the secularization thesis, is an identity in the historical process of ideas must be seen for Blumenberg as a taking over of heterogeneous contents of the same position within 'the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself':[15]

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[12] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 49.

[13] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 48.

[14] According to Blumenberg, this thesis is asserted by Leo Strauss in *Natural Right and History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953, p. 312. Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 55.

[15] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 64.

> What mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization... should be described not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated.[16]

How this methodological and conceptual tool works in the explanation of the history of ideas is shown in the next section.

II. Modernity as the Second Overcoming of Gnosticism

Blumenberg applies the category of reoccupation to account for the transition from the late Middle Ages to modernity. His narrative of this historical evolution begins with an analysis of the attack against the legitimacy of the modern age, and therefore of the idea of progress, raised by attempts to trace their emergence back to Gnostic doctrine. Not that Blumenberg denies a connection between the modern age and Gnosticism, but he sees the modern age as *the* overcoming of Gnosticism rather than a relapse into it. Indeed, in his view the modern age represents the second overcoming of Gnosticism. The first overcoming occured at the beginning of the Middle Ages and resulted into a failure. The story of these overcomings told by Blumenberg is rather compelling and deserves at least a brief sketch.

As it is common place in the philosophical literature, the intellectual and moral conflict counterposing Gnosticism and Christian dogmatics is rooted in the question of the justification of what is bad in the world. The ancient, platonic tradition attributed the presence of bad things in the world to the dualism between Idea and matter. In Plato's metaphysics, the demiurge creates the world according to the image of the Ideas but, in the face of the resistance of matter to take on ideal forms, he cannot reproduce the perfection of the original model. Accordingly, the platonic tradition locates the origin of what is bad in the world in the unresolved residue between the blind necessity of matter and the formal perfection of the archetype.

Early Christian theology inherits Plato's metaphysics and explains the imperfection of the world in terms of a fall of the soul from an original harmonious order into the prison

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[16] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 65.

of matter. The lost harmony can be reestablished through an act of redemption of the soul and the return to the origin. But there is a problem with this explanation which lies in the fact that it involves the divine principle in the formation of the world. From this scheme, in fact, God turns out to be simultaneously source of salvation and principle of badness.

Gnosticism rejects this overlapping of positions between the God of creation and the God of redemption. God, the good God, is for it only the bringer of salvation. He lives hidden in a foreign, transcendent, and impenetrable place of pure essence and has got nothing to do with the world. The world was created by the evil demiurge, the opponent of the transcendent God of salvation, and everything he did brings the mark of his imperfection.[17] The final dissolution of the world will be the work of divine justice on 'the demiurge's illegitimate creation.'[18]

Unfortunately, the eschatological potential implicit in the Gnostic doctrine faded away in front of the evidence of the persistence of the world. Rather than plunging into perdition, the world of disorder manifested durable resilience. The longer the world failed to fall down, the more intolerable the consciousness of the impotence of the God of salvation to destroy the faulty achievements of the evil demiurge became. As a consequence, a new arrangement of life which demanded acceptance rather than sheer contempt of the world arose. In polemic with Manichean Gnosticism, for example, Augustine argued that the world was created by God for the sake of man and that care of the world within the context of God's precepts was the only vehicle of salvation. In Augustine's speculation, the origin of the deficiencies of the world does not lie in the malevolent intentions of God at the moment of constructing the world but in the freedom of man to choose between moral and immoral actions.

As responsibility for the bad things in the world is imputed to man, the goodness of God is preserved. Yet, in order to deserve life in this valley of tears as a punishment, the sins of man had to be all too great.[19] But no action stemming from human freedom could be sinful in such a scale as to justify the horror of the world. Aware of this discrepancy, Augustine formulated the dogma of man's universal guilt and the doctrine of absolute predestination. However, as a result of this move, Gnosticism, which seemed to have been overcome through the revaluation of the world and the justification of its creation, returns

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[17] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 128.
[18] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 129.
[19] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 134.

again 'in the form of the hidden God'[20] whose purposes in separating the elect from the rejected are inscrutable. In this respect, Scholasticism and medieval theological speculation failed to subdue the Gnostic doctrine and transposed it into the inscrutability of God's absolute sovereignty:

> Augustine's momentous turning from Gnosticism to human freedom preserves 'order' for the Middle Ages and prepares the way for the return of Aristotle at the height of Scholasticism. The price of this preservation of the cosmos was not only the guilt that man was supposed to assign himself for the condition in which he found the world but also the resignation that his responsibility for that condition imposed upon him: renunciation of any attempt to change for his benefit, through action, a reality for the adversity of which he had only himself to blame. The senselessness of self-assertion was the heritage of Gnosticism which was not overcome but only translated.[21]

Doubt whether the world was created for the sake of man remained through the Middle Ages. It was only when the absolute transcendence of God was perceived as indifference to the fate of man that the order of the world disappeared and 'the alternative of the immanent self-assertion of man through the mastery and alteration of reality'[22] came into the horizon of human possibility. The loss of the world as an ordered cosmos governed by the inscrutable designs of God results in man taking the world in his hands as a *factum* at his disposal. Man is made responsible again for the condition of the world. Yet, he is responsible not, as in Augustine, because of his original guilt placed in the past but by virtue of a more fundamental concern about the future. In Blumenberg's narrative, man puts

forward now a program of self-assertion, 'an existential program according to which [he] posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him and what use he will make of the possibilities that are open to him.'[23]

The concept of self-assertion is introduced by Blumenberg along with the category of self-preservation. In his understanding, self-preservation is not a biological category. It does not merely say that man sets out to equip himself with expedients and technical skills in order to satisfy his most elementary needs; it also says that growth and technological implements are motivated by the will to realize a new kind of humanity in the face of the

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[20] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 135.
[21] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 136.
[22] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 137.
[23] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 138.

disappearance of order in the world and of the deficiency of nature.

According to Blumenberg, this close link between the loss of world's order and the affirmation of man as a creative being has been clearly grasped by Nietzsche. Yet, for Nietzsche modern science as the most powerful instrument of self-assertion is an appendix of the theological Providence. It has helped man to overcome the Middle Ages and gain a new freedom but has not enabled him fully to appropriate that freedom. Science and technology have become a world of their own to whose laws man is now ineluctably subjected. The new challenge of man is for Nietzsche to overcome science into art and its creative power.

Blumenberg identifies instead in the mechanistic philosophy of nature the tool for self-assertion. By tracing a dispute between Leibniz and Clarke on the possibility of applying the principle of sufficient reason to the explanation of nature, he discovers an equivalence between nominalistic and mechanistic, especially atomistic and epicurean, explanations of the world. What these two positions have in common is that they do not allow reason any insight into the origin of reality. Epicurus assumed that the world arose by accident from the divergence of atoms from their parallel paths, whereas nominalism traced the origin of the Creation back to a divine will whose reason and purpose could not be grasped.

Both nominalism and atomism reduced the question of the origin of the world to something meaningless in itself, thus opening the way to man's rational manipulation. When, in early modernity, matter re-occupied the place that in the Middle Ages was taken by God's absolute will, the material *substratum* of the world came to be considered not as a state of affairs given once and for all but as a potentiality available to reason's inquiry. But, from the act of positing the divine in a hidden and transcendent place and depicting his essence as one of absolute indifference to man and the world, atomism and nominalistic voluntarism derived completely heterogeneous consequences. Epicurus's philosophy was meant to bring to visibility the human capacity for happiness precisely on account of the fact that the gods are concerned only with themselves. If no eternal law and superposed Logos guarantee the harmony of the cosmos, man is freed from dependence upon any supreme authority or from the obligation to adhere to the teleology of nature. Unburdened of responsibility for the world, he can retreat into the idyllic spiritual garden of *ataraxia*,

pursue those natural wants which can be satisfied 'without great exertion and expense',[24] and ignore all those empty and unnecessary wants which can find no natural satisfaction.

In Epicurus, practical unconcern goes along with theoretical indifference. The aim of his atomistic physics was to neutralize the need for theoretical knowledge of nature and 'argue for the *irrelevance* of the physical answers to the shaping of life in the world.'[25] After the medieval longing for the beatitude of Heaven accessible to the elect, happiness could no longer be defined in purely negative terms as absence of pain and suffering or suspension of affects and passions. To a man nurtured on the biblical idea of the God of creation and with the theological propositions of redemption and salvation, possession of truth had come to be seen as an essential feature of the concept of happiness. Yet, theological absolutism and the nominalistic claims about the unbreachable transcendence of God meant that man had to relinquish his search for indubitable certainties and adjust his methods of knowledge of natural processes to the inadequacy of his own subjective faculties. The new theoretical system that Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes conjure up at the onset of modernity is therefore based upon the recognition that the statements of science are hypothetical and, rather than mirroring a given reality contemplated from outside, produce it artificially and then subject the results of the simulation to rigorous procedures of verification. In the awareness of nature's heterogeneity to the theoretical subject, theory becomes 'the workplace of human exertion' where man's imagination, capacity for invention, and artfulness are summoned to their full potential in order to formulate conjectures about the unknown mechanisms of the world and discharge man's power for self-assertion. In this respect, Descartes's undertaking to find groundless grounds for theoretical knowledge is more the vindication of human freedom from God than the establishment of the certainty of the Cogito:

> In the *Principles of Philosophy* of 1644 Descartes... described the capacity to abstain from theory as the source of man's independence from his origin - which is to say, from the 'quality' of his God. Whatever man's origin might be and whatever power of deception might dominate him, there remains this minimum of freedom in the act of withholding assent. A god can prevent man from knowing a single truth, but he cannot himself bring about error, unless man for his part freely runs

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[24] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 165.

[25] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 182.

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> the risk of being deceived. So man is not free in that he has grounds for his action but rather in that he can dispense with grounds.[26]

With this definition of the scientific method, Blumenberg's narrative reaches its completion. From now on, he assumes, the history of modernity is of a different quality from what preceded it, and it is the peculiarity of the demand for self-assertion that justifies its legitimacy.

III. Limits of Blumenberg's Narrative: Can It Do Without a Philosophy of History?

Blumenberg's criticism of Loewith's secularization thesis seems to fail to address the real question raised by Loewith. In arguing that the modern idea of progress cannot be derived from eschatological notions of history but is the result of a conceptual readjustment of man's position in the world in the face of the evidence of the fallacy of the eschatological prophecies, Blumenberg disregards the central core of Loewith's argument. This is not designed to establish an identity of content between eschatological and progressive views but to claim that the modern idea of progress contains within its own semantic baggage a redeeming element which cannot be explained by merely making recourse to the breakthroughs achieved by physics and astronomy at the onset of the modern age. In order fully to understand the teleological import implicit in the idea of progress, Loewith contends that the latter must be traced back to a persistent influence of the Christian tradition.

To be sure, in spite of his explicit antagonism, Blumenberg's narrative largely converges with Loewith's when he employs the category of 'reoccupation' to explain the way in which modernity takes over the intellectual territory which theology was no longer able to cover. In this respect, the real polemical object of Blumenberg's dispute is Loewith's assumption that, by disclosing its Christian roots, the idea of progress is delegitimated. Blumenberg is instead determined to show that modernity, with all the ideas which define its concept, is legitimate because it was the only way out of the intricate tangle of contradictions in which the medieval theological tradition was caught up. His apparently cryptic claim that modernity represents the second overcoming of Gnosticism

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[26] Cf. H. Blumenberg, ibid., p. 185.

is precisely meant to show that, within the continuity of the historical process, the modern point of view introduces an element of rupture. But, to this end, he needs to extend his analysis to the intellectual contribution of Epicurus's atomism, thus devising a theoretical framework for the development of Western thought which reproduces the essential features of philosophy of history. For instance, it is only a wide and total examination of the evolution of the ancient philosophy into the Middle Ages theological speculation that allows him to argue that, whereas in the context of the Hellenistic worldview an attempt to neutralize nature was possible for Epicurus, at the culmination of the Christian experience such a resort was precluded by divine absolutism. Therefore, a renewal of mechanistic atomism after the historical development of the theological tradition could end up only into a scientific project of mastery of nature in order to protect man from the fear in the irrationality of the world which that tradition had generated.

This expansion of the span of the analysis commits Blumenberg to the kind of historical totalization underlying any philosophy of history. To advocate the thesis that the idea of progress is an aspect of the demand for human self-assertion which marked the advent of the modern age requires a dilation of the limits of the historical narrative and, as it were, a projection of the meaning of history as a whole. My claim is that Blumenberg succeeds in his attempt to legitimate modernity as long as he integrates the scientific modern enterprise into the wider context of the history of Western thought. But, as Pippin argues, to the extent that he holds on to his commitment to isolate a specific historical dialogue and declines to answer questions about the totality of history, his project fails:

> ...Someone like Hegel would want to know how we can accept the theological tradition as a necessary component in our legitimation of modernity if we do not know the full story of the motivation of that tradition. The particular story of the relation between modernity and any premodern crisis does not legitimate anything unless the premodern tradition is itself, somehow, legitimate. Predictably, Blumenberg wants to tell that story by isolating the dialogue of questions and answers that defined the relation between the ancient and early Christian traditions. But at some point it becomes fruitless to look for the motivation of some question in another question.[27]

In the context of the debate between Blumenberg and Loewith we are confronting a typical interpretive situation. In order to confute the idea that a homogeneous conception of history is shared by Christianity and modernity, Blumenberg goes too far in the opposite

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[27] Cf. R. B. Pippin, "Blumenberg and the Modernity Problem", in R. B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, cit., pp. 265-285, p. 285.

direction. He offers a narrative of the emergence of modernity which leaves behind the eschatological component. Yet, the latter cannot be removed not only because Luter and Melanchthon were obsessed with the thought of the end of the world, but also because, whether it be agreeable or not, it is precisely within the eschatological conception that the relation between the linearity of historical time and the idea of future obtains. And it is not true that the Greeks did not have a linear conception of historical time. On the contrary, the idea of the succession of universal empires was handed down from the Greeks to the Christian prophetic practice, thus initiating the eschatological tradition. If the complex relation between historical time and future is not grasped, it becomes extremely difficult to understand and contextualize the critical and intellectual contribution offered to modernity by authors like Descartes or Spinoza. After them, the notion of progress has represented also the belief in a non-apocalyptic future of transformation, even though, by doing so, it has imposed a sense and direction on history and therefore justified massacres and misdeeds.

Since the idea of progress implies a goal transcending the actual historical context, no analysis of its content, whether condemnatory or apologetic, can be carried out without resorting to historical totalization. To provide a defence of the possibility of progress in history involves not only an account of the directionality of the course of history but also the formulation of a moral judgement on the pattern of the historical transformations which the theory has identified. In this thesis, for instance, I will demonstrate that both Nietzsche and Heidegger discern a quasi-teleological movement in Western history and that, at least Nietzsche, can be regarded as a progressive thinker. Yet, the man he envisages to overcome the present conditions of nihilism is not a desirable one and does not meet the criteria of human emancipation and liberation I advocate after Marcuse. But we cannot appeal to any sort of a priori argument in order to establish the superiority of one model of human progress as opposed to the other. As a consequence, passing ethical judgement on the course of history remains an inescapable moment of any theory of progress.

If there is an anti-totalizing intent in the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger, I show in the course of this thesis that their anti-totalizing view of history goes along with a concept of totality in the form of a nihilistic vision of modernity as a process of decline and degeneration. Categories of totalization like progress and self-emancipation constitute an essential aspect of modern self-reflection and underpin the inescapability of totality thinking. In my view, there is a continuity underlying modern Western civilization which

is conducive to an understanding of our historical experience as a project of emancipatory totalization. Nietzsche and Heidegger, in spite of their explicit repudiation of the concept of totality, remain anchored to an idea of totalised modernity which reproduces the theoretical pattern of radical philosophy of history. In this respect, they never abandon the conceptual ground that they so bombastically challenge. Nietzsche holds to the 'totality' of the ascetic ideals as the mask of modernity while Heidegger maintains the 'totality' of the forgetfulness of Being as the unspoken logic of the entire history of Western metaphysics.

Philosophies of history offer a methodological instrument for dealing with the question about the sense of our historical experience. They articulate the hopes of a better social order by projecting onto a possible future the needs and aspirations of the present. Within the context of their sweeping speculations, the idea of historical progress acquires a rational and critical content. This idea is not logically entwined with a conception of history as a unilinear and necessary development. Totality thinking has generally recognized the historical boundedness of its wide-ranging claims. Yet, in its historical self-consciousness, it purports to raise the limited particularity of its own standpoint and values to the level of universal validity. Progress is not a definite concept which could be derived by means of empirical generalization from the continuity of the historical process. On the contrary, the elements determining the body of its content are disseminated in the alternating vicissitudes of the contingencies of history and must be patched together not just by putting each piece in relation to another as isolated fragments of a confusing patchwork but by reconstituting their unity from the perspective of a willed future. In this respect, the task of giving meaning to the idea of progress involves both a systematic analysis of the contradictions underlying the present conditions of life and a selective activity of choosing the values and aspirations from whose viewpoint the analysis is conducted. Without a relation to a value, the particular historical facts which fall under the scrutiny of critical analysis would lose their historical interest and become unessential.

Philosophies of history provide man's project of self-realization with conceptual and critical tools. In particular, the categories of dialectics are able to capture the dynamic possibilities implicit in the current historical situation and to anchor transcending images of future liberation to the immanent conditions of modernity. The model of philosophy of history I suggest here is closely linked to a dynamic historical theory of essence. Since the scope of the philosophies of history covers the totality of the historical events, a distinction

between actuality and potentiality, between what things are and what they could be constitutes a fundamental methodological tool of the analysis. In the conclusion of this thesis, I embrace Marcuse's materialist and dialectical theory of essence. Its content is expressed by him in these terms:

> To the interest governing the materialist dialectic, its object, the totality of the process of social evolution, appears as an inherently multidimensional, organized structure. It is by no means the case that all its data are equally relevant or "factual". Some phenomena lie close to the surface, others form part of the central mechanism. From this distinction results a first and still completely formal concretion of essence as what is essential: in a very general sense, essence is the totality of the social process as it is organized in a particular historical epoch. In relation to this process every individual factor, considered as an isolated unit, is "inessential", insofar as its "essence", i.e. the concept of the real content of an appearance, can be grasped only in the light of its relation to the totality of the process. [28]

A reading of the overall historical process presupposes the possibility of comprehending the essence of a sequence of events in the immanence of their manifestations. So understood, the essence is not suspended in the clouds of a platonic realm of ideas but resides in form of tendencies and potentialities in the constellation of social relations:

> This definition of essence already implies the whole theory of history that deduces the totality of the conditions of life from the mode of social organization and that at the same time provides the methodological<and conceptual tools making possible knowledge of the historical tendencies effective at a particular time. On the basis of this theory the essence of man is understod in connection with those tendencies which have as their goal a new form of social life as the "Idea" of that which practice must realize. Considered this way, the image of man represents not only what can already be made of man today, what "in itself" can already be today, but also the real fulfilment of everything that man desires to be when he understands himself in terms of his potentialities.[29]

If no theory of progress can do without the moral and teleological *pathos* inherited from the Christian tradition, I believe that Marcuse's materialist-dialectical framework of social and historical analysis provides the methodological and conceptual instruments to account for a radical transformation of the present conditions of the world and avoid the abstractness proper of the eschatological visions of the future. Philosophies of history are not necessarily theodicies, even though they carry with them a moral import. Similarly, to make predictions about the future course of history is not necessarily to prophesyze. But

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[28] Cf. H. Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence", in H. Marcuse, *Negations,* Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1968, pp. 43-87, p. 70.

[29] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., pp. 72-73.

the construction of a theoretical system in which it becomes possible for man to account for his own transcendence while remaining faithful to the finitude of his existence has never been obvious. This is so not just because of conceptual difficulties inherent to the comprehension of history but because of man's existential uneasiness in dealing with his own destiny. What characterizes the idea of progress is not as much a blissful faith in technology as its roots in modernity meant as the watershed between the tolemaic and the copernican man. This dividing line belongs only to Western culture and releases the fate of man from any external and eternal commands. It culminates in the 1789 French Revolution, declares that God and the King are things of the past, and throws the individual back onto itself. But it inaugurates at the same time a happy and an unhappy condition for man. Among these men left alone with themselves the social bondage is no longer provided by a vertical order - the precepts of the Church, the law of the king and the father - but is made to reside in the horizontality of the *citizens* who look like brothers without primogeniture. Everybody is born free, proclaim the terrifying principles of 1789. Everybody is equal in the share of power they carry with themselves. It is up to them, the sovereign people, to establish an order which has been written nowhere.

The depth and intensity of the existential struggles it has taken for man to arrive at a full appropriation of his own destiny is epitomized by Rousseau's dissatisfaction at history and time, a theme to which I devote the next chapter before entering the central core of the thesis.[30]

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[30] In the following chapters I will offer a highly selective reading of the authors I will be dealing with. The number of texts from which I will extrapolate their thought is limited. I am aware that, taken within the context of their *opera omnia,* the interpretation of each of them could be quite different. Yet, my study is focused on the idea of progress and it is the particularity of this subject that constitutes the guiding principle of my research and determines the process of selection. However philologically rigorous one may be, a certain degree of interpretative violence is inevitable in this kind of proceeding.

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LONGING FOR THE ETERNAL

Rousseau's Struggling for a Transcendence of History and Time

I. Introduction

In his essay on *The Three Waves of Modernity* Leo Strauss describes the crisis of modernity in terms of a crisis of modern political philosophy. He discerns the signs of this crisis in the fact that 'modern Western man no longer knows what he wants - that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong.'[1] The horizons of such a sense of bewilderment have been opened up, according to Strauss' analysis, by Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, who rejected the values of the whole philosophical and theological tradition and called for an overcoming of the gulf between the is and the ought, the actual and the ideal.

In the classical and biblical tradition, Leo Strauss argues, all natural beings were conceived of as beings directed towards an end understood as the ultimate completion of their nature. As regards the human species, it was believed that nature posited the standard of perfection for man in the development of his rational faculty as well as in the establishment of political and social institutions aiming at the realization of the good. The successful outcome of this course of action was guaranteed by nature itself which was meant to be, on account of its inner order, teleologically framed within a harmonious whole presided by the goodness of God. The place of the microcosm man in the wider cosmic order was assigned to him by nature at the very beginning, and man was just required to conform his behaviour to its dictates.

However, the emergence of modern natural science destroyed the theoretical basis of classical political philosophy.[2] Final causes were replaced by the logical deduction of theorems out of general laws discovered by means of empirical induction, while nature

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[1] Cf. Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity", in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited by H. Gildin, Pegasus, New York, 1975, pp. 81-98, p. 81

[2] Cf. Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity", cit., p. 87

was perceived as a chaos in need of being reduced to order throughout man's intervention. Scientific laws took the place of the laws of nature, and truth and meaning lost the transcendence of their ontological status to become objects of fatiguing and exhausting human activity. Man held firm sway of nature as it was realized that it is in fact human understanding which prescribes nature its laws. Nature does possess no purpose on its own. 'Everything good is due to man's labour rather than to nature's gift... Accordingly, the political society is in no way natural: the state is simply an artifact, due to covenants; man's perfection is not the natural end of man but an ideal freely formed by man.'[3]

Leo Strauss attributes to Machiavelli the authorship of having risen the first wave of modernity. Through his reinterpretation of classical virtue, Machiavelli is betokened to have lowered the scope of morality from the kingdom of God down to the reign of political society. The question of how to realize the good, as stated by Strauss, becomes with Machiavelli a technical one, a question of how to organize the state in accordance with man's capacities and limits.

The second wave of modernity is instead represented by Rousseau. Leo Strauss reads in Rousseau's thought a chasm between his "classic" doctrine of the general will which found full development in the works of Kant and Hegel, and his "romantic" fluctuation towards a quasi-mystical "sentiment of existence" which seems to evoke, though substantial differences, the unrest dissatisfaction of Goethe's Faust "with everything finite, finished, complete, classic."[4] On the one hand, Rousseau introduces in the philosophical tradition the idea that man's humanity "is due not to nature but to history"[5]. The entire network of the categorical concepts that we now summarize by such words as "rationality" or "morality" is the result of a long historical process which is not teleological but accidental. Only once rationality has been actualized and man has become an animal capable of calculating and linking means to ends, the idea of a meaning immanent in history gains a significant stand. Man being an unlimitedly perfectible and malleable animal endowed with free will, Rousseau comes to reckon that it is in principle possible to make the particular wills come together in order to

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[3] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 88

[4] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 90

[5] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 94

forge social institutions universally acknowledged. Were it the case, the positive law, as distinct from the lofty and higher natural law, would end up mirroring the general will, thus bringing to sight that historical process which hitherto has denied itself to any sort of human prediction. On the other hand, there is for Leo Strauss, certainly vague and unclear even though not underground and esoteric, 'another fundamental thought of Rousseau'[6]. Rousseau was never fully convinced of the possibility of man gaining freedom and happiness in civil society. Society as such, not just the bourgeois society of the capitalist era based on inequality and exploitation, is a source of distress and alienation. Man can find the authentic dimension of life and cultivate the original sentiment of existence only by returning from society to nature. Society is the world of virtue, reason, moral freedom, and history, but it cannot give man "goodness" and "happiness" which belong to nature and natural existence. However man may struggle in order to attain unity and harmony in his soul, his efforts will turn out to be vain and futile since the gulf between goodness, as predicate of sensibility and compassion, and virtue, as predicate of sense of duty and obligation, is unbridgeable.

Rousseau's conception of the sentiment of existence as a peaceful and harmonious experience was questioned by Nietzsche, whom the third wave of modernity is related to. Inasmuch as there is something like the sentiment of existence, Nietzsche contends, it is a sentiment of "historic" existence, which is necessarily tragic. Nietzsche recognizes that Rousseau is right in claiming that the human problem cannot be resolved in social or political terms, but at the same time he maintains that 'there is no escape from the human to nature: there is no possibility of genuine happiness, or the highest of which man is capable has nothing to do with happiness.'[7]

The synoptic point to which Leo Strauss' essay can be led is the construal of the problem of modernity in terms of an ethical relativism that is the consequence of the emergence in modern philosophy of the historical consciousness. In discovering the historicity of human nature, Leo Strauss underlines, Rousseau paves the way to an analysis of rationality no longer bound to be conducted *sub specie aeternitatis*. But here, as Ansell Pearson underlines, Rousseau's thought faces a great paradox: the transition of man from a sub-human and pre-human condition to a fully human one is

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[6] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 92

[7] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., pp. 94-95

described as a transition from an amoral and ahistorical way of life to a moral and historical one. Yet, at the same time, the historical process that is designed to deliver a rational and moral humanity, far from fulfilling its promises, is actually held responsible for substituting present-day moral degeneration and the soul's disharmony for the original, simple, and transparent happiness. Leo Strauss grasps in Rousseau's dilemma both the challenge of modern thought to the fixed and eternal norms of rationality and the modern despair, brought about precisely by the historicization of reason, of a totality which history cannot give.[8]

By following Leo Strauss' reading of Rousseau, in this chapter I analyse Rousseau's understanding of modern civilization. In many respects, a great deal of the contradictions of modernity converge in Rousseau's thought. If, on the one hand, with his genealogical examination of the process of civilization he leaves behind the pre-modern search for metaphysical absolutes, on the other hand, the discovery of historical time as the shaping principle of human life discloses to his consciousness the sense of human despair in a world with no secure grounds. Rousseau never overcomes this existential paralysis and his philosophical wandering is emblematic of the wandering of modern consciousness in coming to terms with the appropriation of its own destiny.

In section II, I examine Rousseau's rejection of the classical idea of human essence. Though claiming that man is fundamentally good, Rousseau contends that his nature is subjected to historical transformation. However, Rousseau's standing on this point is considerably ambiguous. In section III, through an analysis of the *Second Discourse*, I show how he comes to see certain principles holding in the state of nature as binding moral codes in the course of human civilization. Yet, the contradictions into which the idea of natural law is cast lead him to replace it with the concept of 'law of reason', that is, with a set of historically acquired rather than naturally given moral criteria. This step forward in the evolution of Rousseau's thought marks the attempt of the *Social Contract* to provide philosophical grounds for civil society. But Rousseau has never been at ease with this quasi-Kantian solution of his philosophical dilemma. He was well aware that the echo of the voice of nature, with its promise of happiness, resonates so deep down in the recesses of human consciousness that imposition on man

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[8] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 5.

of a system of moral virtue inevitably ends up denaturalizing him and introducing a painful conflict in his soul. Rousseau suggestively expresses his dissatisfaction at the idea of good life in his last work, the *Reveries*, with which the final section of this chapter is concerned.

II. Rousseau's Abandonment of the Idea of Human Essence

Rousseau's ambiguity with regard to the antinomy between nature and artifice, his wriggling amid transhistorical flights to a transcendent reality and appeals to an overcoming of the predicament of modern civilization within history, have been well summed up by L. Gossman in his definition of Rousseau as 'the prophet of history who despaired of history.'[9] Despite the philosophical impasse into which he was plunged, it is still an undisputable achievement of Rousseau to have undertaken an understanding of the concept of human nature in historical and dialectical terms. In his depiction of the evolution of the human species, humanity's actual configuration appears as the result of extensive historical transformations. At the same time, the direction towards which the historical course proceeds is deeply affected, as Horowitz suggests, by the 'biological development' of human nature. This constant transfiguration of the ways in which human beings are shaped across history encourages Rousseau to abandon the idea of the existence of an unchangeable human essence.

The historical development of society as well as the historical evolution of human nature combine together in Rousseau's thought to account for the transformations of both external and internal nature. 'By beginning to produce the means of his subsistence, the natural man creates culture'[10], gives new shape to his surrounding environment, and embellishes the architectonic of his soul with new passions. The historicization of human nature and the naturalization of history make up in Rousseau's reflection the key through which to provide a portrayal of the progress of civilization dispensed with any sort of divine or immanent order of nature. Rousseau rejects the Enlightenment's static and abstract concept of a human nature governed by eternal

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[9] This quotation is taken from K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 5.

[10] Cf. A. Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987, p. 31.

laws. In particular, he rejects a conception of human nature revealed 'in the form of a system of deductions derived from axioms grasped by rational intuition.[11] On the contrary, in his view, the content of human nature is to be grasped through an analysis, which may be called 'historical anthropology'[12], capable of going beyond the mere inductive generalizations carried out by the modern science of ethnography in order to follow the process underlying present-day constitution of human beings.

But if 'human nature is history and is itself created within the historical process'[13], does Rousseau not face the consequence of seeing the distinction between nature and artifice collapse? Is his appeal to a conception of human nature that develops itself via interaction with the external world not equivalent to a denial of any atemporal and absolute standards of humanity? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to undertake an examination of the *Second Discourse* by focussing both on Rousseau's historicization of morality and rationality and on his ambiguous stance on the ontological status of natural law.

What is at issue in this *Discourse*, as Rousseau himself puts it, is 'to indicate in the progress of things the moment when, right taking the place of violence, nature was subjected to law; to explain by what sequence of marvels the strong could resolve to serve the weak, and the people to buy a repose in ideas at the price of a real felicity.'[14]

In this introductory passage Rousseau seems to suggest that it is in the meandering of an enigmatic historical transition from the state of nature to civil society that lie the foundations of modern civilization. Nevertheless, 'the philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of going back to the state of nature, but none of them has reached it.'[15]

The main reason why the philosophical tradition has failed to attain the true essence of the state of nature is that 'it has carried over to the state of nature ideas acquired in civil society.'[16] Rousseau resorts to the state of nature in his attempt to

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[11] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p. 47.

[12] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p.49.

[13] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p. 52.

[14] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men", *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 3, University Press of New England, Hannover and London, 1992, p. 18.

[15] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, ibid., p. 18.

[16] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, ibid., p. 19.

inquire into the philosophical foundations of society in order to gain a vantage viewpoint from which to launch his vigorous accusation against the moral degeneration and corruption of modern civilization. The analysis of the state of nature is meant to supply a picture of natural man which may be used 'as a norm for judging humanity.'[17] Rousseau believes that it is possible to form a judgement of our present state only throughout an understanding and knowledge of natural man. In his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, for instance, he mounts his attack on the miserable condition into which modern humanity has been plummeted by mythicizing an earlier, more original time when transparency prevailed in human relations and the vices of excessive pride and vanity were unknown.[18]

In this perspective, Rousseau deals with the themes that are at issue in the *Second Discourse* 'through hypothetical and conditional reasoning', that is by forming 'conjectures , drawn solely from the nature of man and the beings surrounding him, about what the human race might have become if it had remained abandoned to itself'[19], or if God had not taken man out of the state of nature. Such a fictional representation of the state of nature fosters a Kantian interpretation of the pre-historical condition of humanity that regards it as a 'regulative Idea' which our minds should imaginatively make up to 'in order to understand the nature of social man.'[20]

Nevertheless, the investigation of the *Second Discourse* into the state of nature seems to reveal historical truths when that state plays the role of an actual historical condition which precedes the emergence of civil society. As Leo Strauss claims, 'the *Second Discourse* is meant to be a history of man.' And Rousseau's text seems to confirm it:

> An immense space separates [the natural state and the civil state]... It is in [the] slow succession of things [happening in this space] that [one can] see the solution to an infinite number of problems of morality and Politics which the Philosophers cannot resolve... [In this space is the explanation of] how the soul and human passions, altering imperceptibly, change their Nature so to speak; why our needs and our pleasures change their objects in the long run; why, original man vanishing by degrees, Society no longer offers to the eyes of the wise man anything except an assemblage of artificial men and factitious passions which are the work of all these new relations and have no true foundation in Nature...

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[17] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p.77.

[18] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, ibid., p. 2.

[19] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, cit., p. 19.

[20] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 56.

> Savage man and Civilized man differ so much in the bottom of their Hearts and inclinations that what constitutes the supreme happiness of one would reduce the other to despair. The former breaths only repose and freedom; he wants only to live and remain idle... On the contrary, the Citizen, always active, sweats, agitates himself, torments himself incessantly in order to seek still more laborious occupations... The genuine cause of all these differences [is that] the Savage lives within himself; the sociable man, always outside of himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others; and it is, so to speak, from their judgement alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence.[21]

This state in which everything becomes artificial and deceptive, and man has pleasure without happiness is not the original state of man. Rousseau feels the necessity of looking back to the state of nature because of his persuasion that the problem of civilization can be resolved by 'determining what is original and what is artificial in the nature of man.'[22] The historic-anthropological analysis that he embarks on in the *Second Discourse* is thereby a sort of genealogy, an attempt to ascertain the real origin of man. This tracing back to the state of nature is designed then to provide him with a definition of the true nature of man that may serve as a measure of value according to which passing judgement on modern civilization.

Both the Kantian reading of Rousseau's depiction of the state of nature as a regulative Idea and the genealogical interpretation of it as a source of actual historical truths appear to lead to the conclusion that Rousseau acknowledges the existence of an objective standard of morality worthy of pursuit. This view, though, is rejected by Horowitz. He contends that no hypostatized abstraction is presupposed by Rousseau to account for the origin of human history. The perfectibility of natural man's faculties and the malleability of his passions are the sole preconditions of history sufficient on their own to explain the evolving of an instinctually structured animal 'to the point where cultural and historical development takes the place of organic evolution as the mode of response to environmental change. But human history, although it presupposes an emergence from nature, does not do away with the necessity embodied in nature. Human history as opposed to pre-history will reproduce a blind, quasi-natural necessity in its own sphere.'[23]

It is precisely this point that, according to Horowitz, marks Rousseau's detachment from the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Whereas the latter tried to

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[21] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, cit., pp. 65-66.

[22] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 55.

[23] Cf. A. Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History*, cit., p. 80.

submit both the dominion of natural phenomena and that of ethical occurrences to abstract universal laws arrived at inductively, Rousseau refused to seal off human nature within a static and fixed system of general principles. Prior to being identified with the logic of reason and abstract thought, human beings are for Rousseau characterized by their sensuous, affective, and desiring dimension. Horowitz emphasizes to such an extent Rousseau's featuring of man as a sensuous and suffering being, as opposed to an abstract absolute subject, that he regards the emergence of history from nature as at the same time the entrance of nature into the history of artifice. The two moments are not to be separated insofar as history is not just the history of reason, but the development of a more compounded whole.[24] Through this dialectical unfolding of human nature across history, Horowitz takes Rousseau as saying that history is not proceeding towards a transcending end. Man is his own artificer and creates himself by transforming external nature. The historical activity in which men are engaged proceeds in an 'eternal tension between biology and culture, between bodily desires and its modes of expression and satisfaction.'[25]

In Horowitz's opinion, Rousseau rules out the dominion of reason in history both as providence and as progress since reason can never suppress passion once and for all and take on the command of the individual's will. An element of unpredictability is inextinguishable from history and prevents it from being fixed within a static and calculable framework. Paradoxically, what makes history unpredictable is not freedom but necessity. Horowitz points out the extent to which the freedom of natural man lies in his insensitivity to an exterior will. But his indifference 'coincides with his own complete lack of self-consciousness.'[26] Inasmuch as it unfolds itself instinctually and does not involve power of choice, freedom, on the pre-historical and pre-moral level, is necessity. Similarly, the animal-man which comes out of nature and inaugurates history is subject to a sort of natural necessity, namely to the necessity of producing his means of subsistence by undertaking social relations with others. Here social dependence appears as a kind of second nature. It presupposes negativity as the capacity of

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[24] In his defence of Rousseau's historical anthropology, Horowitz argues that Rousseau surpasses in some respects the historico-philosophical insights of German idealism. This critique of the idealistic absolute subject seems, however, to be misleading insofar as it misses, for instance, Hegel's crucial distinction between reason and intellect.

[25] Cf. A. Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History*, cit., p. 85.

[26] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p. 129.

opposing oneself to the external world, and is engendered by a limitless and unsatisfying desire for recognition. Its historical outcome is the establishment of a society of masters and slaves in which the contenders are imprisoned either by their own ethos as a caste of warriors or by their being reduced to a subhuman condition of total submission. Not even the bourgeois society that supersedes the master and slave society does display free relations among the by now civilized men. The relations of instrumental reciprocity constrain the individuals to subject themselves to a new nature, 'the pseudo-nature of the market. Freedom here turns out to be the subjection of persons to a blind and mechanical economic dynamic. It is at the same time the erection in the political sphere of a Hobbesian sovereign out of the appearance of atomized conflict in civil society. This Rousseau calls a return to a "new state of nature".'[27]

In brief, according to Horowitz's interpretation of Rousseau, the history of civilization ends up extending and deepening the sphere of necessity of the state of nature. It being impossible to annihilate nature, the internalization of cultural requirements through social morality as the condition of self-esteem produces a sort of neurotic conflict. Therefore, the dynamic and dialectical unfolding of history across time turns out to be nothing but the tale of the manifestations of repression demanded by civilized work. On this account, history itself may be defined as the development of the 'capacity for neurotic conflict inherent in human cultural existence.'[28]

III. Rousseau's Dilemma: Happiness or Virtue?

Rousseau's standing with regard to the existence of natural law might be better understood in the context of his criticism of Pufendorf and Hobbes. Rousseau quotes Pufendorf at the beginning of the *Second Discourse* as representative of a school which, against Hobbes's claim that man is naturally inclined to attacking and fighting, asserts instead that he is timid and peaceful. In the state of nature, Pufendorf argues, men used to practise the natural law which was known to them by reason. The abandonment of the state of nature and the establishment of the artificial civil state were made necessary in order to enforce the law of nature imperfectly obeyed by natural man.

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[27] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p. 130.

[28] Cf. A. Horowitz, ibid., p. 134.

Hobbes labels this view as moralistic. He contends that natural law does not exist in the state of nature since its commands, whenever they are not obeyed, are not sanctioned. On the contrary, justice, the rules of right and wrong, does derive from the power of the state. What makes the latter work is not natural obedience to or the knowledge of the natural law, but two non-moral grounds:' the passion of fear' and 'the agreement to accept the sovereign's will as absolute.'[29]

In the face of the conflict between Pufendorf and Hobbes, Rousseau's position is ambiguous. In the *Second Discourse* he seems to be telling the story of man in order to account for the existence of the natural law which has been overridden by the development of civilization. He apparently presents the description of the state of nature as hypothetical, but the unravelling of his exposition makes it obvious that the state of nature is an actual historical condition out of which man has been drawn. The main reason for Rousseau's claim that his presentation of the state of nature is hypothetical is that the account he gives of it contradicts the biblical teaching about the origin of man. What remains hypothetical for Rousseau is not as much the concept of the state of nature as the narration of the development within the state of nature from the earlier simple, idle, and indolent way of life to the later Hobbesian war of all against all which demands the establishment of despotism.

The story that Rousseau sets out to tell begins with a 'physical' and 'metaphysical' investigation into the animal-man. Man, he claims, is an 'ingenious machine' which is distinguished from the other animal machines by virtue of his displaying two peculiar characteristics: free agency and the faculty of self-perfection. Freedom and perfectibility elevate man above the rank of mechanical necessity, thus accounting for the spirituality of his soul:

> [A beast] chooses or rejects by instinct and [a man] by an act of freedom, so that a Beast cannot deviate from the Rule that is prescribed to it... and a man deviates from it... Physics explains in some way the mechanisms of the senses and the formation of ideas; but in the power of willing or rather of choosing, and in the sentiment of this power are found only purely spiritual acts about which the Laws of Mechanics explain nothing".[30]

As to the element of perfectibility, Rousseau posits in it 'the source of all man's

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[29] Cf. A. M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 133.

[30] Cf. J. J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, cit., pp. 25-26.

misfortunes.' It is this quality in fact that by progressively enlightening his reason, yet absent in the first stages of the state of nature, 'makes him the tyrant of himself and of the state of nature.' The primitive operations of human mind are elementary, confined to the capacity of willing and not willing, to desire and fear. Knowledge has its roots in passion which in turn derives its origin from our needs. The number of passions which natural man feels is though very limited. His desires or fears are aroused by the simple impulsion of nature, since his imagination cannot evoke objects of which the intellect is still unable to form an idea:

> His desires do not exceed his Physical needs, the only goods he knows in the Universe are nourishment, a female, and repose; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger.[31]

This depiction of man in the state of nature clashes considerably with the one painted by Hobbes. Rousseau charges Hobbes of inconsistency for, though assuming that man is by nature social, he improperly carries over natural man a multitude of passions that might have been acquired only in society. Among these passions, in particular, Hobbes attributes to man, on account of his having no idea of goodness, a natural desire for aggression and dominion over others. Rousseau, instead, contends that men in the state of nature, ignoring any sort of moral relationship or duty, are neither good nor evil. They do not injure each other for its own sake, but only if they believe that it is necessary to their own self-preservation. They consider their acts of violence as natural occurrences that, far from arousing feelings of resentment or desire of revenge, stir up pure sentiments of joy or grief of success or failure. There being in the state of nature 'no comparative assessments of value between human beings',[32] they do or suffer from violence without actually experiencing a sense of injury. Underlying Rousseau's analysis is the belief that the moral value of human actions lies for Rousseau in the sphere of intentions that is still concealed to beings whose actions arise out of immediate instinct. To feel a sense of injury one must have developed throughout a long process of socialization a moral sense by means of which one is able to trace back the value of human action to recondite intentions of rightousness or wrongdoing. Instead, on the level of a pre-reflective mode of existence man lacks even of the knowledge of death. And he lacks of reason. Reason is coextensive with language,

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[31] Cf. J. J. Rousseau, ibid., p.27.

[32] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 64.

which in turn presupposes social intercourse and communication. Thus, natural man living on his own, language cannot be natural and human rationality must have been acquired historically.

All this reasoning seems to lead to the result that for Rousseau natural man is "good" because he is subhuman:

> Man is by nature good because he is by nature that subhuman being which is capable of becoming either good or bad. There is no natural constitution of man to speak of: everything specifically human is acquired or ultimately depends on artifice or convention. Man is by nature almost infinitely perfectible. There are no natural obstacles to man's almost unlimited progress or to his power of liberating himself from evil. For the same reason there are no natural obstacles to man's almost unlimited degradation. Man is by nature almost infinitely malleable.[33]

The obvious inference that one is induced to draw from Rousseau's thesis that natural man is subhuman and pre-rational, is that 'he is utterly incapable of any knowledge of the law of nature which is the law of reason.'[34] On this account, the transition from the state of nature to civil society cannot be due to a rational decision of beings who are actually pre-rational, but to natural accidents whose sequence is not dissimilar from mechanical causation. This inference is, however, not straightforward as it may appear to be. In fact, the assumption of natural man's incapacity to know the natural law does not imply the fact that in the state of nature there is no natural law. On the contrary, Rousseau claims that there is actually in the state of nature a particular 'principle', that he calls compassion, which tempers and moderates the excessive manifestations of self-preservation, and prevents natural man from doing evil. In the state of nature this principle takes the place of laws, morals, and virtue. It inspires all men with this maxim of natural goodness: 'do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others'.

Thus, as a matter of fact, it is Rousseau's opinion that a natural law does exist, even though it is not understood by natural man in linguistic and conceptual terms but in form of a natural feeling. Yet, how can there be a law prior to rationality and regardless of any sort of linguistic formulation? The dilemma contained in this question makes Rousseau's concept of natural law paradoxical insofar as, on the one hand, it is conceived to preside over the state of nature and modulate its development, while, on

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[33] Cf. Leo Strauss, "The Crisis of Modern Natural Right", in *Natural Right and History*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953, pp. 252-294, p. 271.

[34] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., pp. 270-271.

the other hand, the state of nature does not *de facto* include the conditions, namely natural man's capacity of reflection as well as possession of language, which are required to implement the effectiveness of natural law.

It is precisely in the conundrum of the paradox explicated above that the chasm identified by Leo Strauss in Rousseau's thought opens up. Indeed, Rousseau does acknowledge the existence of natural law but he proves also that in the state of nature its moral prescriptions are not enforced, provided that the acts of wrongdoing cannot be sanctioned. Therefore, as the existence of an objective standard of morality is utterly unable to impose a binding moral code on the individuals, on the other hand, the compassionate behaviour of natural man is too weak to prevent him from falling into a warlike condition. Rousseau's solution of this conceptual paralysis lies in turning the "law of nature" into a "law of reason". In other terms, Rousseau gives up the idea of finding a norm for man by going back to the state of nature. This state is sub-human and pre-rational, no natural end is perceivable in it. It is governed by a blind necessity. At this stage the natural law is not properly a "law", it affects feebly and vaguely the feelings of natural man without involving his ethical dimension of free decisions. In order to establish a bond of society strong enough to keep it together, morality must be grounded on reason. Not on an abstract reason but on a kind of reason which assigns a primary role to passion and sentiment.

Also the progress of human mind across history seems to offer to Rousseau an empirical support upon which he can rely in his search for universal standards of morality. Humanity is acquired, and human rationality is the result of the historical process. Man's struggling to come out of the state of nature was painful and tormented. Besides, it was necessary, in the sense that it was determined by accidental natural causes. Yet, in the end, man came through this multitude of afflictions and reason emerged. From then on, man has no longer been 'moulded by fortuitous circumstances but rather by his reason. Man, the product of blind fate, eventually becomes the seeing master of his fate. Reason's creativity or mastership over the blind forces of nature is a product of those blind forces.'[35]

It must be underlined that, in spite of its seemingly triumphal emergence, reason does not represent the eschatological meaning of the consummation of the history of the

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[35] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 273.

world. Rather, Rousseau keeps holding to the position that history is meaningless and that the historical process is accidental. He denies that through civilization man has experienced any authentic progress. In his opinion, the transition from the state of nature to civil society states a formal ratification and institutionalization of the original usurpations perpetrated by the rich to the damage of the poor. Culture, far from enlightening reason, hypocritically disguises in its refined dressing-up the fundamental injustice upon which society is based. Of course, Rousseau cannot ignore the immense technological advancement as well as the significant intellectual and moral achievements realized through the process of civilization. But he rejects the belief that these "marvellous conquests" make up remarkable pieces of a progressive history. Indeed, he points out how the development of human mind has been outpaced by the scattering of new desires unleashed by reason. The passions of vanity and pride, for instance, have grown in the moral world out of the moral idea of "authority" which supplemented the "inoffensive" and "innocuous" physical power of natural man. Similarly, the desire for great wealth reproduces on the individual and existential level the social demands associated with the institution of property on the political level. As a consequence, Rousseau cannot accept the presupposition of a meaningful historical process that would make it preferable to the sub-human state of nature:

> To the extent to which the historical process is accidental, it cannot supply man with a standard, and ..., if that process has a hidden purpose, its purposefulness cannot be recognized except if there are trans-historical standards. The historical process cannot be recognized as progressive without previous knowledge of the end or purpose of the process. To be meaningful, the historical process must culminate in perfect knowledge of the true public right; man cannot be, or have become, the seeing master of his fate if he does not have such knowledge. It is, then, not knowledge of the historical process but knowledge of the true public right which supplies man with the true standard.[36]

The expression "true public right" mentioned by Leo Strauss refers to the law of reason which Rousseau is meant to have taken on as a substitute for the traditional natural law. Such a rational law, though transcending the historical world, is not meant to be abstract and ineffectual. What reconciles it with the empirical reality is its being rooted in the sphere of passion and desire. Rather than envisaging a metaphysical archetype of human perfection, the law of reason represents a formal rule whose fulfilment leads to the universalization of the individual will. It is a test of generalization by means of

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[36] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 274.

which the instinctual and biological desire is elevated to the rank of a rational one. According to this test, human desires are forced to restrain their drive to fulfilment by one's recognition in all other wills of the same right to realize their own desires.

This reading of Rousseau's concept of the general will is heavily influenced by Cassirer's neo-Kantian interpretation.[37] Cassirer contends that Rousseau is primarily concerned with the problem of reconciling virtue and happiness. The utilitarian and hedonist moralities paint a shapeless portrayal of man as passively subject to nature, while the moral systems based on the pure idea of virtue bind the ethical will to obey to a universal law experienced by the actual subjectivity as too high an ideal to meet its real needs. Rousseau holds, according to the neo-Kantian interpretation, that virtue can be identified with "freedom" or "goodness" if the moral law is made to originate in the individual itself rather than emanate from a heteronomous source. Self-legislation becomes then 'the conventional substitute for natural compassion.'[38]

Rousseau believes that the overcoming of the state of nature was made necessary by the weakening of compassion. The capacity of natural man to have a sense that there exists a form of life which is beyond his own moderates his desire for self-preservation. However, accidental necessity introduced within the state of nature radical changes which brought about inequality, dependence of human beings on each other, and the appearance of the passions of vanity and pride. As a consequence, compassion started to fade away, leaving men increasingly threatened in their struggle for self-preservation. This condition of constant and frightening uncertainty eventually called for the stipulation among the endangered individuals of a social contract designed to guarantee common survival. Nevertheless, the new conventional corporation which gathers the heirs of natural man within a compact civil society is characterized for Rousseau by an intrinsic self-contradiction. Regardless of its illegitimate sanctioning of earlier usurpation, it forces individuals who by nature have been made to be on their own to come together and form an organic and harmonious whole. The denaturalization of man's most fundamental structure produces deep in the individual a painful conflict, which demands to be transcended, between his profoundest conscience, still intensely sensitive to the pure and untouchable voice of nature, and his moral duty.

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[37] Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, pp. 258-273; plus *The Question of J. J. Rousseau*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1963.

[38] Cf. Leo Strauss, *The Crisis of Modern Natural Right*, cit., p. 285.

Since civilized man turns out to be lacerated in his soul and alienated from himself, while natural man was happy and in peace with himself, 'civil society must be transcended in the direction not of man's highest end but of his beginning, of his earlier past.'[39] Yet, there is no way to return to the original state of nature. The process of civilization has so deeply transformed human nature that man has been expropriated of his blessed Paradise once and for all. At this stage, the good life which Rousseau is longing for can be founded only 'in the closest approximation to the state of nature which is possible on the level of humanity.'[40]

A Kantian compliance of the denaturalized individuals with the universal pattern of the general will is meant to realize the purpose of fulfilling natural liberty within a community based on social interdependence. But an identity between the individual and the moral-collective body can be achieved at the sacrifice of the individual's self-interest. Rousseau attempts to overcome the conflict between the deep voice of consciousness and moral duty by advocating a radical transformation in the nature of the individual. However, he cannot escape from constructing a pure and abstract will refractory to the vicissitudes of historical life if the way by which the particular will gains moral freedom is that of becoming a tyrannical master of its desires.

Rousseau's concern with the happiness and autonomy of the individual requires that morality, far from being subjected to a purely ideal end, be rooted in the domain of passion and self-interest. This presupposition seems to be eluded when he describes the universalization of the rational will in terms of self-education and political participation to the moral-collective body. The process of education that the individual undergoes turns out to be nothing but a process of acquisition of a sense of responsibility through which the individual learns to control its instincts by compulsion and discipline. But, whereas the labour of self-legislation in terms of creation of maxims of action capable of being universalized to all rational wills is a condition of morality in Kant's system, it cannot work without contradiction when it is conveyed to the ambit of Rousseau's formulation of morality. In Kant, the generalization of the individual's proposed course of action succeeds in transcending the subjective viewpoint since the motive of duty, from which the moral action derives, does not appeal to any sort of heteronomous end.

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[39] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 282.

[40] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 282.

By contrast, Rousseau's emphasis on the motive of natural goodness of man, his longing for the happiness of the pre-social and pre-political life make "true freedom" unattainable on the level of moral virtue. Insofar as the standard of the good life is posited in the immediate pleasures of nature, virtue, conceived of as the effort to tame and domesticate the mere impulse of appetite, is experienced by the moral agent as a burden which demands perennially to be transcended. To the extent that this is the case, it can be said that Rousseau's civilized man who nostalgically looks back to the primitive state of nature is doomed to bear the traits of that spiritual figure which Hegel called "unhappy consciousness". His unhappiness lies in his incessant unrest and dissatisfaction, in his utter incapacity to be constrained by whatever given system of rules. Happiness, autonomy, and freedom are always excessive, they always exceed the boundaries of the established moral norms. Thus, since either they are total or they are not, they are to be sought beyond duty and virtue, beyond any attempt to define their essentially indefinite and undefinable horizons.[41]

IV. The Sentiment of Existence: Rousseau's Discontent with History and Time

Rousseau's attempt to transcend the historicity of our present limitations throughout the construal of an abstract and pure will stems from his pessimistic view of history. History appears to his eyes totally meaningless. No sense and direction is perceivable in it. There was indeed a moment in our history, or pre-history, when men were independent and free. But that natural independence is irretrievably lost. Any endeavour to restore it must come to terms with the continual deepening and expansion of our selfish needs. Moreover, whereas, on the one hand, the modern institutions seem to be inadequate to provide the individuals with an edifying process of education leading to the realization of the good life; on the other hand, the idea of good life is characterized by such ahistorical connotations that it takes on the features of a secularized version of the other world never susceptible of being actualized through a concrete development in time.

Lost his faith in history, that is in a moral outcome of the historical development, Rousseau takes flight from the world by seeking refuge in an extemporaneous

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[41] Cf. Leo Strauss, ibid., p. 290.

annihilation of the will. As discontent with civilization becomes increasingly deeper, he comes to realize that the fundamental source of human unhappiness lies in the experience of time. The transition from the solitary natural form of existence to society brings about first of all an essential change in the way in which humanity perceives the flowing of time. Natural man was barely able to extend his projects to the end of the day. In the state of nature, no expectation about the future or regret about the past agitated his soul entirely given over to his present existence. The idea of the future makes its entrance on the stage of history the last phases of the state of nature, when the idle and assembled life of the first rudimentary tribal agglomerations give rise in the human mind to the sentiment of self-esteem and the need for self-recognition. The awareness of the ever-opened possibility of death arouses a sense of transitoriness and caducity in human affairs. Nothing appears capable of preserving a permanent form beyond its inexorable becoming and fading away, nothing seems to be stable enough which human beings may hold on to. The ceaseless sinking of the soul into a succession of fleeting moments makes happiness impossible to be experienced:

> Everything is in constant flux on this earth. Nothing keeps the same unchanging shape, and our affections, being attached to things outside us, necessarily change and pass away as they do. Always out ahead of us or lagging behind, they recall a past which is gone or anticipate a future which may never come into being; there is nothing solid there for the hearth to attach itself to. Thus our earthly joys are almost without exception the creatures of a moment; I doubt whether any of us knows the meaning of lasting happiness... And how can we give the name of happiness to a fleeting state which leaves our hearts still empty and anxious, either regretting something that is past or desiring something that is yet to come? [42]

The acknowledgement of the perennial passage of time leads Rousseau to express a desire for negation of time by annihilating the temporal self, and to seek alternatively a compensation for the happiness denied to the soul throughout its incessant flowing in a single and lasting state which is not made up of fleeting moments:

> But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passage of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call

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[42] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1979, p. 88.

> ourselves happy... What is the source of our happiness in such a state? Nothing external to us, nothing apart from ourselves and our own existence; as long as this state lasts we are self-sufficient like God.[43]

This desire for the oblivion of the self throughout the raptures of solitary contemplation represents Rousseau's last desperate attempt to retrieve that fundamental feeling of contentment and joy in mere existence which humanity lost along with its natural goodness. By transcending time, Rousseau believes that it is possible to reach the ultimate nature of man deep in the profoundest recesses of the soul where the individual is harmonious and at once with itself. There one can find a state of peace and repose which is the denial of the restless desire for progress and of the irresolute strife for possession and power prevailing at the superficial level of life.

Such an absolute and self-sufficient self is not understood by Rousseau teleologically as a perfected nature which needs to be actualized in order to realize the final Idea inherent to human essence. The self is rather characterized as a "perceiving subject", "a thing that thinks and senses", "a Cartesian ego" existing 'through its indubitable presence to itself.'[44] It is an ego related to no external object, bodily or ideal, since it is no object at all. It is 'the deepest thing within one', which manifests itself metaphysically as a 'sentiment of pure existence.' No set of qualities specifies its articulation, for, as a pure feeling which is always the same, it is fundamentally one and self-consistent.

By positing the true nature of man in the sentiment of existence, Rousseau postulates a priority of feeling and emotion as opposed to reason and knowledge. Reason is a calculating faculty which, by operating with objects, projects the self onto the external world, thus alienating it from its primary ground. Indeed, an impulse for self-extension directed to no purpose but feeling more fully the mere actuality of existence is in the nature of the self. But when this goalless expansiveness outspreads to the extent of dissolving the unity of the soul, existence can no longer be felt as a whole while division and conflict cast the self into an inextricable spiral of contradictions.

Regardless of any moral and teleological content, Rousseau's discontent with civilization seems to be rooted in the belief that the frenzied social activity in which modern man is engaged disintegrates the unity of the soul meant as the formal

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[43] Cf. J.J. Rousseau, ibid., pp. 88-89.

[44] Cf. A.M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*, cit., p. 39.

condition for a full and consistent existence. Through social life and worldly intercourse, man is plunged into the flux of the external things so as to be prevented from becoming truly one. Hence, on the one hand, man has to stretch out his clutches to the temporal dimensions of past and future in order to escape from perishing each instant in the ceaseless stream of sensations and gain unity over time; yet, on the other hand, this same self-expansion leads him to remain caught in the flux of worldly things and lose that continuity of shape which makes him recognizable over time. Accordingly, the condition of civilized man is like that of alienated beings whose overwhelming preoccupations and anxieties about the future have detached themselves to such an extent from their own present self that they have lost the main source of temporal unity, namely their centre of being, from which plenitude of existence springs. In order to feel life fully, one must be master of one's life as a whole, unify one's actions under a common denominator, and express the same way of life across changing times and aspects. In sum, one must live one's life as a single state where the soul can find rest and unity of inclinations, thus allowing affections not to clash with duties and inner order and harmony to prevail over chaos.

The internalization of the contradiction inherent to personal dependence on external means underpins Rousseau's indictment of modern civilization. What really constitutes the core of his disenchantment in the historical development is the belief that striving for growth and advancement has brought about disharmony and disunity of the soul. In the course of civilization men have become accustomed to pursuing ends by acquisition of means. This has engendered a division in the soul. Men have learned to defer the satisfaction of their desires until an indeterminate future time while turning their attention to the attainment of means perceived necessary for the acquisition of future goods. Thus, while aiming at ends which are well beyond their present capacities, their lives are almost entirely taken by the necessity of controlling these external means. Hence, divided from themselves and alienated from their true needs, men abandon their natural inclinations and give themselves to things they do not really need. By doing so they postpone *ad infinitum* their existence without ever possessing what they truly wish. There is no moment in their life for which it would be worth

saying: let this moment last forever. Always drifting "on the way", they never are where they ought to be.[45]

V. Conclusion

Through his investigations into the origins of man, Rousseau has disclosed the historical character of human nature. But the historicity which accounts for the development of reason and consciousness leaves him without any prospects of redemption from an involute historical process. History is meaningless and demands to be transcended. The sense and direction of this overcoming is given by an objective standard of morality meant to be beyond history. Yet, inasmuch as the call for an overcoming comes from the pre-historical and pre-moral ground of natural law, its voice is destined to remain mute, since it requires a regression of humanity to a kind of state for which its present faculties and inclinations are inadequate. On the other hand, if the standard is posited in an ideal world rationally achievable, then it turns out to be fairly high for a being whose passions and inclinations are still too sensitive to the appeal of the voice of nature. In a certain sense, history is for Rousseau a sort of twilight zone, impracticable and undesirable on its own, but too far away both from the vanishing gleam of its blessed origins and from the dazzling light of the pure Idea. Rousseau's checkmate is that of the philosopher who seeks the eternal after discovering the historicity and transitoriness of life. As soon as he approaches the thought of the constant mutability of human affairs, he is plunged into anxiety and despair. The more he tries to do without the eternal, the more he finds himself overwhelmed by the expectation of eternal salvation. But man cannot be himself without reckoning time into the dimensions of past, present, and future. The single state that Rousseau longs for as a resting-place for the modern wandering consciousness is an attempt to find an "instant of eternity" in which time and eternity may touch each other. Here language relinquishes clear semantic distinctions and enters the blurred region of the oxymoron. The words no longer mean what they are supposed to mean. They merely express a desire to deny time through the oblivion and annihilation of the self.

Where Rousseau, in spite of his many failures, sows, his successors reap. A

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[45] Cf. A.M. Melzer, ibid., pp.66-67.

blatant and insolent challenge to the aspirations of modernity is launched by Nietzsche. In his defiance of the achievements of modern civilization, Rousseau never dared to question the ultimate foundations of human life. He criticized progress as it has unfolded itself through history; he also disclosed the appropriation by man of time and history as the source of his unhappiness, but he always conducted his own analysis from the vantage point of an original and untainted Paradise which humanity lost at the moment of entering civil society. It is this premise of an unquestioned, mythical realm of happiness that Nietzsche puts into question. However, he succeeds in his attempt to combine time and eternity only as long as he exposes the tragic foundations of human life. But to recognize that all human achievements are illusory escapes from the terrifying truth of existence was too high a price to pay for a generation triumphantly celebrating the impetuous march of history. Is there a middle ground between the extremes of the nihilistic emphasis on the tragic side of human life and the romantic search for a pure, heavenly origin? My argument in this thesis is that there is or, in other terms, that the idea of progress can be justified within a dialectical pattern of philosophy of history in which historically determined potentialities of human emancipation and liberation are progressively realized. Yet, contrary to the Hegelian model, I do not see the culmination of the historical process as resulting in a return to the perfect, though further enriched, unity of the beginning.

However, before posing my claim in favour of an emphatic but rational conception of progress, let us confront the two champions of the anti-Enlightenment thought: Nietzsche and Heidegger.

3

"Beyond the North, beyond the ice, beyond death - our life, our happiness..."

or rather

HOW NIETZSCHE THE HYPERBOREAN COMES TO GRIPS WITH THE BRAKES OF HISTORY

I. Introduction

The quotation placed above in form of a tag marks the outset of Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ* and epitomizes, in its evocative and suggestive phraseology, his constant and unsatisfiable yearning for a mythical country of warmth and plenty. Nietzsche claims to have discovered there happiness and found the exit out of whole millennia of labyrinth. The labyrinth into which he was meandering is that of modernity, an existential age of regression and decadence which has internalized human consciousness deep inside into the most hidden and obscure spiritual profundities. Emergence, through an act of "defiant affirmation" of life in its transitoriness and passing away, to the joyful "second innocence" of an "unconscious existence" is the landing-place towards which the Hyperboreans are driven by the blustery blowing of the north wind.

Nietzsche brings to a radical conclusion Spinoza's and Hegel's philosophy of immanence. According to his reading of their works, both these philosophers, though asserting that man and the world lack of any 'supernatural gift emanating from a transcendent domain',[1] conceive of the realm of immanence as a humanized being endowed with human-like forms. They assume that an internal necessity governs the world according to a self-justifying system of rational laws, and that a set of fixed and eternal categories captures the essence of reality and makes it intelligible. Nietzsche, instead, rejects this pantheistic idea of a cosmic meaningfulness as a legacy of the old religions. It reflects, he contends, the anthropomorphic conception of a subject-like

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[1] Cf. Y. Yovel, "Nietzsche and Spinoza: *amor fati* and *amor dei*", in Y. Yovel (ed.), *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986, pp. 183-203, p. 186.

universe which projects chimerically upon the incessant stream of immanence the human-made rational forms of regularity and duration. But, in Nietzsche's mind, no flight from the finitude of his being is available to man in order to raise himself above the boundaries of his temporal existence and realize the spell of eternity. Rather, the rational categories which man attaches to the world of immanence to confer upon it a sense of order and permanence are illusory. The necessity into which the ever-transient flux of the cosmic will to power is inscribed is in fact an 'opaque and unintelligible *fatum*'[2] absolutely unjustified in its indeterminate unfolding.

Assent to the inexorable transience of life and internalization of this truth open the way, Nietzsche believes, to true knowledge. In this perspective, knowledge retains a liberating effect on life. It 'purifies the individual from decadent images and false metaphysical consolations'[3] and provides him with the torch of a disenchanted and critical enlightenment by means with which to illuminate the path leading to the self-overcoming of morality. Yet, the disillusionment descending from the knowledge that man is inescapably constrained within the confines of the immanent universe 'is a source of suffering and a temptation to despair.'[4] The task of the overman is then that of bearing the burden of as much truth as possible and transforming, via artistic creativity, the existential qualm for the meaninglessness of human existence into Dionysian joy.

In spite of cultivating a tragic sense of life, Nietzsche designates, however, a 'perspective of human ascendance and perfectibility.'[5] His challenge to the 'divine part' of man that makes up to 'complacent self-images and comforting illusions', [6] though cutting within his soul a dark side of shock and horror, looks forward to a kind of joyful knowledge delivering the gift of existential liberation. Nevertheless, since in the ambit of a radical philosophy of immanence the prospects of self-overcoming cannot spring from some supra-natural norm or latent structure of the universe embodying the moral world-order, they must reside in a natural principle capable of re-shaping life merely by drawing upon its own immanent resources. Therefore, Nietzsche resorts to the doctrine of the will to power as the theoretical postulate grounding the man's inherent inner

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[2] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid., p. 186.
[3] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid., p. 185.
[4] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid.
[5] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid., p. 188.
[6] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid.

drive to enhance his vital and creative powers. The spontaneous and self-productive activity of the will to power moulds life from within and sublimates it above its raw original givenness. From its mechanical - but not mechanistic - play universal moral obligations do not descend for humanity. The will to power is not an external and transcendent substrate dictating self-denying ascetic rules. Any sort of superior and extra-natural principle, when imposed upon life from without, has the effect, in Nietzsche's view, of frustrating its invigorating manifestations and constraining the fundamental striving for power.

Life as will to power is essentially a drive towards self-transcendence. This dynamic thrust to augment the power of existence, far from suggesting a purposive organization of the universe, seems to operate accidentally. Yet, absolute contingency involves simply the world of immanence considered as a whole. Within this world, however, the primordial drive inherent to human beings 'to go beyond their boundaries and become more'[7] is not blind and meaningless, even though it is not guided by *a priori* norms deriving from a transcendent realm. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that, since in projecting their own constitution and self-transcendence within the universe of immanence human beings need a meta-perspectival criterion of interpretation mediating the ongoing one-sided standpoints, we can more consistently understand the history of humanity offered by Nietzsche in his most disparate writings within a hermeneutic-ontological framework. Although Nietzsche agrees that there is no final perspective of life dazzling in some better future to give meaning to the world of immanence, he still acknowledges, I seek to show, that the task of undoing and shaping again and again the finite and transitory forms cannot be carried out without relying upon some kind of conceptual and logical order. To substantiate this hypothesis that Nietzsche has of his philosophy of history, I will also show that he sets up a paradigm of human evolution designed to account for the emergence of the sovereign individual. The recourse to a historically founded rational pattern of interpretation does not undermine, however, his claim that nothing durable and permanent is available for man to hold on to. Immanence remains inescapable. But, insofar as we have to make sense of it in order 'to will' it, the hermeneutical process of understanding the past and projecting the future, though bound not to evade the instantaneous character of life,

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[7] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid., p. 192.

cannot help but draw on the *logos*, half translucent and half opaque, of history and its categories.

Nietzsche develops an ontologico-hermeneutical theory of the world in order to account for the historical self-transcendence of man within immanence. His rejection of religion, morality and utopia as illusory escaping towards a comfortable metaphysical 'Beyond' marks at the same time the utmost affirmation of the transience of life. He denies time any qualitative character. The idea that there is a real temporal process called history and that this process delivers novelty, advancement and progress is a residual semi-mystical attempt to combine time and eternity so as to nullify the ineluctable finitude of existence into an indeterminate infinite. Indeed, each moment is doomed to pass away and die. Man's hope for an eschatological 'next world' or 'after-life' ignores the burdensome truth that nothing will replace our present life. Accordingly, Nietzsche recognizes 'the horizon of immanence as the totality of existence'[8] and craves for a joyful acceptance of time's transitoriness and flowing away. But as this acknowledgement, rather than being pursued by means of intellectual abstraction, has to proceed from the affective and instinctual part of life, it demands a cultural transformation. A revaluation of moral values designed to overcome Christianity and to make of man his own creator is the instrument that he devises in order to accomplish his project of *amor fati*. He points out how life, though stemming in the totality of its passions from an encompassing natural first principle, has taken on in the course of history various and often opposite configurations. The morality of resentment underlying Christian culture has brought about a decadent and degenerate form of life apparently in contradiction with the urge of the will to power for a healthy, flourishing, and positive affirmation of life. Consequently, what Nietzsche calls for is an act of liberation whereby the destructively regressive tendencies of Christian morality, which have so indelibly shaped modern man, are assimilated and overcome into a higher type of human being. With his indictment against the world-weary and decadent values of modern civilization, he is not advocating, however, a radical break in the continuous course of events which would result in a total negation of the outcome of history and in the establishment of an indistinct supra-human being. On the contrary, by submitting the concept of reason to an immanent critique, Nietzsche embarks on the

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[8] Cf. Y. Yovel, ibid., p. 198.

task of carrying out a genealogical analysis of the origin of our moral values - deemed to be the foundation of modern civilization - in order to determine what can yet be done with man as he is now.

Since modern consciousness has been deformed by the historicist pursuit of an overabundant historical knowledge, he 'doubts that modernity can still fashion its criteria out of itself.'[9] Nevertheless, aware that 'the modern time-consciousness prohibits any thoughts of regression, of an unmediated return to mythical origins',[10] he assumes a 'utopian attitude' which looks at the future as the horizon within which modernity is reconciled with the archaic. Thus, a movement of reaction introduced into history by the slave revolt in morals is turned into a movement of progress. When the world is divested of all God's shadows and man takes upon his own shoulders the task of creating himself, 'the plastic power of life' cannot be exercised in a manner different from interpreting the past from the standpoint of the present and trying to heighten it to the level of a superior synthesis. This interpretive act, however, does not make for a dialectic of enlightenment. To Nietzsche's mind, personal perfection as conditioned by reasoning and dialectics is a kind of self-contradiction.[11] His alternative is the acknowledgement that our creative power is not unlimited, his philological sensibility having shown that, insofar as history sets the scenario upon which the works of art are performed, 'it is difficult to escape the whirlpool once it has spun us around for a few thousand years'. This amounts to saying that, whilst it is true that a degree of consciousness makes perfection impossible, it is equally true that the pursuit of perfection beyond the boundaries of historical consciousness is an empty, ineffectual and vainglorious effort.

The chapter unfolds as follows: in section II, I argue that Nietzsche's understanding of the role of history in human life must be explained within a hermeneutical framework as it is developed by Gadamer. To any reader of Nietzsche who sees him as the supreme advocate of the demolition of the past as a condition of historical innovation, this interpretation of his thought might appear paradoxical. Yet,

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[9] Cf. J. Habermas, "The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point", in J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, pp. 83-105, p. 86.

[10] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid., p. 87.

[11] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Random Horse, New York, 1967, Aph. 289.

by revisiting the *Second Untimely Meditation*, I contend that Nietzsche, while denying the possibility of objectifying history, never claims that history is something we can do without. Rather, he believes that, as historical beings, we are always involved in history and that, in the process of understanding ourselves, we are bound to make an object of interpretation. In this respect, Nietzsche argues that our interpretive activity of understanding ourselves is not arbitrary but is conditioned by our own historical achievements.

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer explains that the possibility of understanding the past is ontologically grounded upon the existence of a universal element mediating between the different historical epochs. In section III, I show that within Nietzsche's philosophical system the dyonisian glimpse into the absurdity of human existence can be seen to represent the principle of universal mediation for the hermeneutical experience of understanding the past.

The hermeneutical framework within which I read Nietzsche's thought plays in this chapter the role of a methodological device whereby I set out to disentangle the riddle of his genealogical analysis of our moral values. My aim is to offer a dialectical interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of history accounting for his progressive conception of overcoming in terms of a synthesis of Christian and pagan morality. Therefore, in sections IV and V I embark on the examination of *On the Genealogy of Morals* and show that Nietzsche's inquiries into the origin of our moral values are designed to provide an insight into the origin of our humanity and to prefigure the historical possibilities opened to our future advancement.

This interpretive line implies the claim that genealogy is an exercise not just in monumentalistic but also in critical history, an issue which I address in section VI. Finally, in section VII I sketch an outline of Nietzsche's philosophy of history accounting for the appearance in modernity of a mature and enlightened individual endowed with the capacity of autonomy and self-legislation. This story serves to show that for Nietzsche the act of overcoming man as he is now must be carried out on the basis of what he has happened to become up to now.

II. Nietzsche's Early Hermeneutics: Historical Consciousness and Interpretive Activity

Despite the current interpretations which regard Nietzsche's philosophical thought as unsuitable to any sort of historiographical collocation, there is sufficient exegetic evidence to include it within the tradition of hermeneutic ontology. The expression "hermeneutic ontology" refers to a specific philosophical orientation which traces back to Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's attempts to determine critical foundations for historical reason and which, throughout Heidegger's pursuit of an existential analysis of *Dasein*, develops up to Gadamer's elaboration of effective historical consciousness, Ricouer's reflections on metaphor, and Derrida's philosophical practice of deconstruction.[12]

Nietzsche's accreditation within the tradition of hermeneutic ontology is better highlighted by confronting his revaluation of historicism with the objectivist ideal of historical knowledge aiming at reconstructing methodologically the details of antiquity in terms of the categories contemporaneous with their epoch. In the *Second Untimely Meditation, On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche embarks on the task of assessing the value of history and showing that we need history 'for the sake of life and action, not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action.'[13] Any form of historical knowledge, which is 'not attended by action' but is cultivated as 'a costly superfluity and luxury'[14], affects life to such a degree that this becomes 'stunted and degenerate.'[15]

Modern man, according to Nietzsche, suffers from his historical sense. Unable to forget and deprived of 'the capacity to feel *unhistorically* during [his] duration',[16] he is denied happiness:

> He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past... will never know what happiness is. ...Imagine the extremist possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no

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[12] Cf. G. Vattimo, "Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics", in Y. Yovel (ed.), *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, cit., pp. 58-68, p. 58.

[13] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p. 59.

[14] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 59.

[15] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid.

[16] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 62.

> longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger.[17]

Cratylus' claim according to which we cannot even once plunge into the same river is revealed to us by the simple sight of a grazing cow who passes us by thoroughly unaware of the flux of time. Man cannot help but staring at it as if he was facing the vision of lost paradise whose inhabitants go on living 'in blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future':[18]

> Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass you by: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again, and so from morn till night and from day to day, fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure, and thus neither melancholy nor bored. This is a hard sight for man to see; for, though he thinks himself better than the animals because he is human, he cannot help envying them their happiness - what they have, a life neither bored nor painful, is precisely what he wants, yet he cannot have it because he refuses to be like an animal. A human being may well ask an animal: "why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?" The animal would like to answer and say: "The reason is I always forget what I was going to say" -but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering.[19]

It is altogether impossible, for Nietzsche, to live without forgetting. Not without that kind of forgetting brought about by the oblivion of death which 'sets the seal on the knowledge that being is only an interrupted has-been, a thing that lives by negating, consuming and contradicting itself';[20] but without that sort of active forgetfulness which draws a horizon around society and individuals and traces 'a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and dark'.[21] When a human being lets itself be overwhelmingly submerged under the burden of the past, it fatefully exposes itself to a degenerative process of decadence:

> He also wonders at himself, that he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him. And it is a matter for wonder: a moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment. A leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away - and suddenly floats back again and floats into the man's lap. Then the man says "I remember" and envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is

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[17] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid.

[18] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 61.

[19] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 61.

[20] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 61.

[21] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 63.

> extinguished for ever. Thus the animal lives unhistorically: for it is contained in the present, like a number, without any awkward fraction left over: it does not know how to dissimulate, it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as what it is; it can therefore never be anything but honest.[22]

Both the historical and the unhistorical, Nietzsche emphasizes, are necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture. The criterion of 'stylistic unity', which informs his idea of historical knowledge, demands that the past be interpreted from a viewpoint capable of creating historical innovation rather than simply mirroring the bygone events. Man would not be man if he dwelled, like an animal, within a horizon reduced to an extensionless point. Yet, he does not grow vital and truly human unless he preserves 'the capacity to feel to a certain degree unhistorically'.[23] The 'envelope of the unhistorical' enables him to interrupt his excessive and relentless practice of thinking, reflecting, comparing, and drawing conclusions, and begin to exist life-minded. By breaking the circle of his memory through an act of injustice towards what lies behind him, he gains a little vortex of life. No matter he may appear ungrateful to the past: it is a condition of life that, in order to do one thing, one must forget most things.

Nietzsche's vindication of the power of forgetting, combined with his urge to man to enclose himself within a bounded horizon, is meant to remove the influence of Hegelianism on the study of history. No end and no *telos* attend man at the culmination of the historical process. Man would be deceiving himself if he assumed that, with the procession of the course of history, the meaning of existence is gradually disclosed. On the contrary, the character of history as a process is merely apparent, since 'the world is complete and reaches its finality at each and every moment.'[24]

The thought of being epigones drifts into our minds when we believe that the historical phenomena, once occurred, lose their vital and energetic predicates to become dead phenomena of knowledge. But history, pursued as a pure and sovereign science, has a paralysing effect on man's creativity. Far from preparing a salutary and fruitful future for the present evolving culture, it cuts off the new current of life and turns the interest of its devotees to the quiescent recollection and objective reconstruction of what

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[22] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., pp. 60-61.

[23] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 63.

[24] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 66.

has already existed. In opposition to the historical and unhistorical ways of regarding the past, Nietzsche seems to be appealing in this meditation to a supra historical man who does not take history too seriously and is capable of recognizing the vital life-instincts as the constitutive traits of human action. From this supra historical vantage point an eye is cast over the entire trajectory of time so that the past and the present are perceived to be one. In spite of belonging to the endless stream of Heraclitus' river, the past and the present reveal a typical and permanent structure of value recalcitrant to any change. It is life, that is the impulse to act among the alternating moments of suffering and search for deliverance, that in this context plays the role of a metaphysical description of the ontological configuration of the universe. Nevertheless, though lying behind the historical forms taken on by the variegated sublimations of the systems of values, life does not function as a principle of internal order and necessity. Nietzsche keeps the grip firmly on his anti-historicist standing by refusing 'to accept the idea that history is a providential and necessary series of events, whose result and culmination would be our civilization. We are not the *telos* of history, but its casual production, which means that in order to know ourselves we have to plunge into the past, but without *strong* criteria of order or choice.'[25]

There are, for Nietzsche, three predominant forms of considering the past: the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. The monumental consideration of the past goes over the remote epochs of human history in order to single out those classic and rare items worthy of everlasting existence. The great and heroic deeds performed by noble human beings constitute, in Nietzsche's view, a chain which 'unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks.'[26] The man of the present must explore the monogram, cherished in the shrine of history, of the most singular and enlightened creations whose appreciation teaches him how to overcome the transitoriness inherent to the nature of all things.

If a great work of art or a great deed once existed, they were possible and then may be possible once again. In truth, what the future has in store for us is concealed in the dice-box of chance and nothing of what has been achieved in the past can ever again be produced in similar features. Yet, the greatness occurred in earlier times, once

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[25] Cf. G. Vattimo, "Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics", cit., p. 64.

[26] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, cit., p. 68.

purified of its most idiosyncratic aspects and reduced to approximate generalities, is suitable to be exhibited monumentally as something exemplary and worthy of imitation. In this process of monumentalising the past a danger, however, is contained: as long as the past is embellished and beautified through free poetic invention in order to appear appealing, it is distorted. Monumental history, then, has to be balanced with the two other ways of regarding the past, the antiquarian and critical, to prevent the forgetting and neglect of whole segments of it. Indeed, each of these three modes of history serves different purposes: monumental history is designed to be considered by those who want to do something great; those who like to preserve and revere the past, instead, turn to it with the attitude of antiquarian historians; finally, critical history is embraced by those who want to throw off the burden of the past and set off on unexplored and unknown horizons.

The antiquarian sense of veneration of the past makes the individual feel that what he is, his customs and his beliefs, his tastes and his values, are not wholly accidental and arbitrary, but have grown out of a descent. Nevertheless, this uncritical reverence of antiquity, confined to a restricted field of vision, lacks a discriminatory power capable of distinguishing between all the things bequeathed by the past. It honours all that which is past simply for their being past, while that which is becoming and appears new is undervalued or rejected. Hence, antiquarian history, if unrestrained in its self-complacent penchant for collecting, mummifies and stultifies life. In order for man to live and attempt something new, he has to seize the bar of critical judgement and be "unjust".

Not the whole past is worthy being cherished. Critical history brings it before the tribunal of the present to be scrupulously examined. The final verdict is not issued by justice itself. To live and to be unjust is, for Nietzsche, one and the same thing. In breaking up part of the past, the tribunal of critical history condemns it to perish and be forgotten. All that exists is doomed to be dissolved sooner or later in order for new life to be allowed to enter onto the stage of history. Yet, this process of critical judgement is always dangerous:

> For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions, and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself of this chain. If we condemn these aberrations and regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them. The best we can do is to

> confront our inherited and hereditary nature without knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away. It is an attempt to give ourselves, as it were *a posteriori*, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate: - always a dangerous attempt because it is hard to know the limit to denial of the past and because second natures are usually weaker than first.[27]

Nietzsche is careful to mitigate his scepticism about the feasibility of altogether denying our inheritance just a few lines below where, nearly in the form of a law of human nature, he claims that 'the first nature was once a second nature and every victorious second nature will become a first'.[28] The ambiguity of this passage raises a few questions: primarily, if, in coming to terms with our past, we have to see ourselves as necessary links in a chain, how is it possible to break up the uninterrupted progression of this chain and replace our first nature with a second one? Furthermore, assuming the possibility of neutralizing our first nature, does the provisional distinction between first and second nature not undermine the hypothesis of including Nietzsche's thought within the trend of hermeneutic ontology based exactly upon the idea of continuity of traditions?

To summarize, in the *Second Untimely Meditation* Nietzsche sets out to denounce the paralysing effect brought about on life by overemphasis of history. The polemic objective of his accusation is fundamentally Hegel's dialectical account of consciousness' itinerary from the earlier stage of sensible consciousness to the later stage of absolute self-consciousness in terms of a necessary rational process directed towards self-transparency and self-knowledge. According to Nietzsche, in Hegel's view, when reason finally becomes fully comprehensible to itself, history is effectively over. At that point, one recognizes oneself as an epigone or a latecomer of the ages, the supreme product of a past whose particular episodes lead, by virtue of logic-dialectical implication, to the zenith of absolute self-revelation. Since the past has already unfolded the most meaningful and significative circumstances of the total narrative of the world, we epigones can do nothing but taking on the semblances of Minerva's owl which spreads its wings with the falling of dusk to record the events already occurred and give them conceptual systemisation. Rearrangement is the only option left to individuals who have nothing of their own to introduce into history. All the genuine

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[27] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 76.

[28] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 77.

new possibilities have been exhausted so that the latecomers, reduced merely to understand what made them what they are, are deprived of their status as sovereign agents.[29]

Nietzsche rebels against this Hegelian fashion of conceiving history. He contends that history has no meaning whatsoever; above all, it has no meaning unravelling diachronically in the form of a moral drama made up of an intricate plot of threads whose final disentanglement exhibits the triumph of history and the accomplishment of human freedom. Tracing the course of history, we can undoubtedly find out one meaning in it. Yet, this meaning is not embodied in the shell of history as such, but has been 'bestowed upon it by the activities of particular individuals.'[30] These individuals, far from carrying forward some kind of process inherent in history, 'live contemporaneously with one another'. History merely offers them the scenario upon which to perform their 'heroic deeds'. In this sense, if any purpose is to be attributed to history, it cannot but be the production of the highest exemplars. However, the task in which they are engaged is not supposed to change the 'fundamental structure of history', which is no structure at all. Although current retrospective interpretations describe the course of history according to logically ordered patterns, each of these patterns as a whole is meaningless. Their systematic and methodological forms simply mirror the causal sequences of events, whose occurrences, however, have no reason and essentially lack any internal ontological order.[31]

Yet, to deny that the process of history is marching, by reason of internal logical necessity, towards final and conclusive ends, or to deprive history of a fundamental - that is, ontologically founded on essential grounds - meaning does not amount to ruling that the achievements accomplished by the great individuals are illusory and that there can be no 'historical innovation.' Similarly, when Nietzsche refuses to recognize in the subjective identity of an individual 'the being of an unchanging spiritual substance'[32], he is not suggesting that the perennial succession of first and second natures is a trivial and innocuous game of masks. On the contrary, what men have become across history

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[29] Cf. A. Nehemas, "The Genealogy of Genealogy", in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, University of California Press, 1994, pp. 269-283, pp. 270-71.

[30] Cf. A. Nehamas, ib., p. 272.

[31] Cf. A. Nehamas, *The Genealogy of Genealogy*, cit., pp. 272-73.

[32] Cf. R. Schacht, "Of Morals and *Menschen*", in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, cit., pp. 427-448, p. 444.

is a 'genuine attainment' so that, in the interplay of conflicting perspectives, 'a strong center of the interpretative activity is needed in order to give sense to the world of the will to power.'[33]

III. A Medium for the Hermeneutic Experience: The Dionysian Glimpse into the Absurdity of Human Existence

A brief analysis of Nietzsche's conception of the role played by myth in offering an insight into mankind's existential predicament provides the background against which to address the foundations of his early hermeneutics as well as his "appeal to a *Lebenshorizont* capable of delimiting the value and meaning of human activity"[34].

In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche attacks the scientific rationalism of *Sach-Philologie* for pursuing the reconstruction of the relics of the ancient world as 'a myriad of isolated facts apart from a unifying horizon'[35] which endows them with a comprehensive significance. He rejects the Kantian idea that throughout the categories of intuition and understanding the phenomenal world is made intelligible. As Schopenhauer claims, causal explanations simply 'describe the order in which events take place, [but] nothing of their why and wherefore.'[36] When the veil of Maya is torn aside and the synthesis between reason and sense falls apart, the perceived world turns out to be utterly different than the phenomenally intelligible world represented by pre-reflective consciousness. The knowing subject realizes, on his behalf, that he physically belongs to a phenomenal world whose incessant becoming can never be grasped *a posteriori* through the fixed concepts of understanding. But, on the other hand, he feels also that the truly essence of the world of becoming, though intelligible, eludes the concrete apprehension given by perception. Thus, while actually belonging to a world that he knows does not exist, he cannot flee to the noumenal world which does *de facto* not exist - that is, is not susceptible of being schematized by the *principium individuationis*:

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[33] Cf. G. Vattimo, *Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics*, cit., p. 65.

Cf. N. Davey, "Hermeneutics and Nietzsche's Early Thought", in K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought,* Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 88-118, p. 97.

[35] Cf. N. Davey, ibid., p. 95.

[36] Cf. A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Dover Publications, New York, 1966, par. 15. This quotation is taken from N. Davey, cit., p. 103.

> The tension between what a subject conceives of as an intelligible existence and what he perceives as his actual unintelligible existence constitutes the existential horror which is at the root of reflective consciousness.[37]

According to Nietzsche, the reception of Olympian mythology through the mediation of Greek tragedy expresses exactly this 'nauseous insight into the horrific nature of existence.'[38] The existential anxiety suffocating human beings stems from the realization of the illusory nature of pre-reflective consciousness, that is from the awareness that the fixed categories of reason can never seize the flux of becoming. The Dionysian glimpse into the mysterious primordial unity has made the Greeks feel the terror and absurdity of existence. But this truth, which they apprehended in mythological form, is in fact a transhistorical and absolute truth of human existence. Although Nietzsche believes that our epistemological and interpretative categories are historically fluctuating, the existential predicament is still common to both the antique and contemporary worlds. It is this shared insight into the horrible truth of human existence that provides a medium for the hermeneutic experience.

The historical distance between the Greek sense of absurdity of existence and the modern European experience of "epistemological fracture" or "sense of nihility" is not unbridgeable, provided that both are understood as different cognitive frameworks of a universally shared existential predicament. Therefore, the questions with which contemporary philologists interrogate Greek tragedy can be answered insofar as the text of the Greek tragedy is itself an answer to the same question which informs the interest of modern interpreters of Greek civilization. For Nietzsche, the existential glimpse into the senselessness and meaninglessness of life constitutes precisely the common hermeneutical horizon within which the process of understanding and interpretation takes place. The contemporary world and its past are not incommensurable realms. *Sach-Philologie*'s objectivist pretensions to understand the past according to its own canons of interpretation ignores the hermeneutic-ontological fact that the present is an extension and emanation of the past and cannot stand outside its own tradition. Therefore, an examination and understanding of the past is not only necessary in order to understand the present, but also has to be employed in order to transform the cultural

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[37] Cf. N. Davey, ibid., p. 104.

[38] Cf. N. Davey, ibid. p. 100.

problems of the contemporary world and 'mediate the nature of an envisaged historical future.'[39]

In this perspective, the study of the Greek experience of art offers us an aesthetic analogy whereby modern humanity can overcome the experience of nihilism and cultivate an affirmation of the tragic character of existence. As the Apollonian production of works of art provides the Greeks with an aesthetic appreciation of the spectacle of life in all its abysmal and terrifying features, in the same way in the epoch of nihilism individuals should resort to analogous forms of artistic transfiguration in order to withstand the flux of time and affirm the eternal self-creation and self-destruction of life. The extent to which Nietzsche is unwilling to give up the historical consideration of the past is expressed by Davey in these terms:

> The hermeneutic components within Nietzsche's thought and the academic and cultural context in which they are deployed show how questionable it is to regard his thinking as either revolutionary in the sense of breaking with tradition or eccentric in the sense of standing outside. It is a reform of *Sach-Philologie* that Nietzsche was looking for and not its destruction, for the latter would entail the loss of the only cultural exemplar capable of overturning nihilism. The problems which Nietzsche addresses in his discipline and cultural epoch are not placed on the agenda by him. It is he who responds to their emergence.[40]

Nietzsche's hermeneutical procedure seems to anticipate, though in an implicit and not yet articulate way, Gadamer's reflections on the aesthetic experience of a work of art and effective historical consciousness. As a primary element in the process of understanding, effective historical consciousness embodies the "ontological incompleteness" of our historical being. It designates the consciousness of the hermeneutical situation in which we find ourselves when we are engaged in the task of understanding a text handed down by tradition. Since we cannot but exist historically and 'our self-knowledge proceeds from what is historically pre-given, the illumination of this situation can never be achieved completely.'[41] The act of interpretation involves a fusion of horizons: of the horizon in which the interpreter lives and the particular historical horizon within which he places himself. Neither of these horizons are static, but constantly in motion. The horizon of the present and the horizon of the past

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[39] Cf. N. Davey, ibid., p. 110.
[40] Cf. N. Davey, ibid., p. 100.
[41] Cf. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1975, p. 269.

constitute one great horizon which embraces 'the historical depths of our self-consciousness.' This single horizon moves from within so that 'the dialectic of experience can never end with the overcoming of all experience.'[42] Experience points always to some more experience, and this ceaseless reference to other new experiences accounts for its irreducibility to science, that is to the fulfilment of the dialectic of experience in definitive knowledge.

IV. How Men Have Come To Be Those Which They Are: Nietzsche's Genealogy

A further and decisive step ahead to the development of his view of interpretation and of our relationship to the past is made by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Richard Schacht draws a parallelism between the *Genealogy* and what he regards as its companion book, the fifth book of the *Gay Science,*[43] a piece of work added by Nietzsche in 1886 to the four books which composed the original edition of the text.[44] In this fifth book of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche had announced a new task for humanity to perform. After underlining once more the danger of dwelling excessively upon dragging out the past, he had called for human beings to become those which they are. To this end, that is to the end of producing individuals capable of giving themselves laws and creating themselves, he had urged us to become physicists. Lurking behind his appeal to metamorphose ourselves into 'learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world', lay a particular interpretation of morality. In opposition to the commonplace belief that morality is something absolutely basic and foundational, he had tried to demonstrate that it is in fact an interpretation of the physiological phenomenon of human suffering. The cause of this 'intentional feeling', far from being traced back to a divine origin or to obscure occurrences in the profoundest recesses of consciousness, is to be attributed to the brute and crude fact of some kind of physiological deficiency. As such, suffering is meaningless; it has no

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[42] Cf. H. G. Gadamer, ibid., p. 329.

[43] Cf. R. Schacht, "Of Morals and *Menschen*", in R. Schacht ed., *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, cit., pp. 427-8.

[44] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche 'God is Dead'", in M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1977, p. 60.

reason, no agent, no purpose. Morality, by interpreting our impulses and desires according to a metaphysical categorical apparatus of free will, responsibility, and guilt, and by prescribing sets of norms for human actions, both offers suffering a meaning and makes it tolerable.

Viewed in this light, the task of making physicists of ourselves turns out to be a sort of semiotic activity. Under the inspecting scrutiny of 'physics' objectivist method', judgements of value are reinterpreted as symptoms of an underlying physiological condition. In particular, Nietzsche's pursuit of a naturalistic reduction of morality to drives and affects leads him to interpret 'moral prejudices as symptomatic of varying degrees of health and decadence.' [45]

Since moralities are merely a sign-language of affects, Nietzsche invites us not to take moral judgements literally. However, by undertaking genealogical inquiries into the origin of moral values, he seems to realize that the project of becoming those we are requires a kind of understanding that natural sciences cannot provide. Given that our present humanity is not the unfolding of a fixed and immutable nature but the result of a historical transformation from an initial natural existence, we must come to know the conditions and circumstances under which we grew, evolved, and changed in order to understand who we are. Indeed, the comprehension of the process through which we have become those we are goes beyond the mere goal of offering us a knowledge of what we are to enable us also 'to discern what we might yet become.'[46] Nietzsche's call for us to become 'genealogists' adds then to the call to become 'physicists' *via* a 'symptomatological turn' in order 'to account of the historical as well as natural character of our humanity.'[47]

With the aim of reconstructing the historical vicissitudes of how we have come to be what we are, Nietzsche sets about to focus upon morals. The reason is twofold: on the one hand, he wants to emphasize the fundamental role exercised by morality in shaping humanity during its historical development; on the other hand, morality offers a 'case history' which enables him to interpret a system of truths that we have hitherto taken for granted - 'as given', or 'as factual', or 'as beyond all qualities' - as in fact

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[45] Cf. D.W. Conway, "Genealogy and Critical Method", in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, cit., pp. 318-333. p. 321.

[46] Cf. R. Schacht, "Of Morals and *Menschen*", cit., p. 427.

[47] Cf. R. Schacht, ibid., p. 428.

something very 'human, all too human'. Therefore, the genealogical inquiries into the origin of moral values are tightly intertwined with a concern about the origin of our humanity, namely of the type *Mensch* into which we have developed, and the historical possibilities and perspectives opened to our further advancement.

The historic-genealogical question of how the value-judgements "good" and "evil" arose is presented in the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals* as inseparable from the anthropologic-philosophical question of whether these value-judgements are a sign of distress, impoverishment, and degeneration of life, or, on the contrary, of abundance, prosperity, and plenitude of life. Insight into the origin of our moral prejudices is designed to shed light on the emergence and attainment of our human nature, and vice versa. Thus, the analysis of the unegoistic instinct-values of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation involves an assessment of the value of these values. Have they, Nietzsche wonders, hindered or furthered human prosperity? The morality of pity is, to his mind, the sign of an ultimate illness in European culture. It is a bypass to nihilism. There is no evidence that present humanity represents a development of the better or the higher; onward development is not the same thing as elevation, advancement, and strengthening. Progress is a modern, false idea. False, too, is Ree's social Darwinian hypothesis that the most recent product of human evolution is the highest through the 'survival of the fittest' argument.[48]

Both the question of the origin of our moral values and of the origin of our humanity are genealogically dealt with. Nietzsche proceeds in his inquiries by formulating hypotheses about the psychological or historical causes underlying the manifestations of our morality as well as of our being in general. This method of genealogic-experimental reasoning consists in tracing ideas back to psychological impressions or historical circumstances under which conflicting forces clash with each other to impose their dominion. The networks of interrelations, uncovered by genealogy across the historical itinerary through which we have become what we are to account for the transition from an earlier cultural system to a later one, though claiming 'empirical plausibility, does not establish logical or dialectical necessity. Genealogy is not dialectical, and does not assert a general teleology.'[49] Internal teleologies can

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[48] Cf. D. C. Hoy, "Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method", in Y.Yovel (ed.), *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, cit., pp. 20-38, p. 20.

[49] Cf. D. C. Hoy, ibid., p. 34.

certainly be drawn up in order to devise *a posteriori* an explanatory framework of human evolution, but these teleologies do not belong to the historical pattern as a whole, nor do they lead to a final truthful revelation.

In submitting the values of Christianity, around which Western metaphysics at one with modern civilization revolves, to critical scrutiny, Nietzsche relies, however, upon the will to power as a principle of universal validity. The morality of pity epitomizes in fact humanity's propensity to decadence provided that life itself is instinct for growth, for power, and for accumulation of forces. Since in the supreme values of Christianity, in which mankind expresses its higher desideratum and which govern its existence, the will to power is lacking, humanity is strolling along a path of inexorable decline. Nor is philosophy capable of suggesting a way out of this existential catastrophe. Kant's categorical imperative, for example, by imposing upon man an impersonal duty, sacrifices him to the 'Moloch of abstraction'. Man cannot act if motivated by an abstract concept of duty in general, without being compelled by the instinct of life, by a feeling of inner necessity growing out of a deep, personal choice. An entire fictional world, made up of imaginary causes and imaginary effects, of an imaginary anthropocentric natural science and an imaginary teleology, has been devised by Christian morality with the intent of devaluing and denying actuality. Such a fictitious apparatus of moral and religious concepts betrays a profound discontent of man with the natural. As a reaction to his suffering from it, man strays from his instincts and boasts flauntingly a divine or spiritual origin. Nevertheless, becoming conscious or 'spirit' is merely 'a symptom of a relative imperfection of the organism.'[50] The decline of the will to power mirrors a physiological regression, a decadence. Even the concept of God is reversed by the nihilistic relapse: it is stripped of the attributes which constitute signs of ascending life and reduced to the symbol of the weary and the weak. God itself sanctions thus the declaration of hostility towards life and nature and becomes the contradiction of life.

In this perspective, Buddhism, though being a religion of decadence, is for Nietzsche more advanced than Christianity. It is a "positivistic" religion whose phenomenalistic epistemology aims at struggling against suffering rather than against imaginary moral concepts - sin, for instance. Its main concern is to devise procedures or

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[50] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1990, P: 14.

ideas which produce repose, cheerfulness, and absence of desire. Buddhism is a religion for late human beings, for individuals excessively sensitive and over-intellectual:

> It leads them back to peace and cheerfulness, to an ordered diet in intellectual things, to a certain philosophical hardening. Christianity desires to dominate "beasts of prey"; its means for doing so is to make them sick - weakening is the Christian recipe for taming, for "civilization". Buddhism is a religion for the end and fatigue of a civilization, Christianity does not even find civilization in existence - it establishes civilization if need be.[51]

The tendency to denaturalize natural values is inscribed in the origins of Christianity. Christianity is the logical consequence of the 'Jewish priestly instinct' to falsify all reality. Nietzsche hypothesizes that Jewish- Christian morality has originated as a countermovement to an oppressive prior moral order. A slave revolt in morals subverted an historically prior 'noble morality' and established a new system of moral codes based upon resentment. In other terms, the Christian regime of life arose out of the spirit of resentment become creative. Its artistic genius was capable of inventing an abstract moral world-order from whose viewpoint all that which represented the ascending movement of life was rejected.

According to such a reading, the whole conceptual structure of Christian morality and religion embodies a kind of symbolism in relation to which only inner realities are taken as true realities, while everything inherent to nature, time, and history is taken as sign or occasion for metaphor. Thus, the 'kingdom of God', for instance, is not a concrete world belonging to history. Since it transcends any conceivable measure in space and time, it can be understood only as an innermost experience which, in a certain sense, is everywhere and nowhere.[52]

By reducing morality to a phenomenon of consciousness, Christianity shifts the centre of gravity of life out of life into the 'Beyond'. Furthermore, the will to deny reality and denigrate life is not simply posited as a postulate. Christianity is a practice of life: it lays out a set of procedures whose rationale lies in the intention of making the life-denying way of life unconscious. This purpose has been successfully accomplished. Christianity has introduced in the world an art of living by means of which asceticism,

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[51] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., P: 22.

[52] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., P: 34.

that is the pursuit of the ascetic ideal, has been reduced to a complete automatism of instinct.[53]

V. A True Historical Accomplishment: The Entrenchement of Christian Morality into "the Type *Mensch*"

Once he has provided an understanding of 'the type *Mensch*' we have come to be, Nietzsche, by means of an investigation into the origin of our moral prejudices - which discloses at the same time a perspective upon the origins of our humanity - goes on to discern what might yet be done with man. His rejection of the idea of man as a definite entity endowed with a timeless and ahistorical essence does not imply the assumption that the "contingencies" which influence our development leave our identities constantly fluctuating. On the contrary, history, and especially the history of the ascetic ideal, is for Nietzsche overloaded with meaning. Epochal events have undoubtedly imposed upon us forms of life that have radically transformed the structure of our being. Yet, throughout his existential wanderings, man has preserved to some extent the shape in which he was carved. The forms that have forged his coarse nature cannot be annihilated at once. For this reason, no transformation is ever experienced lightheartedly. The change which occurred when man found himself enclosed within the walls of society and of peace is portrayed by Nietzsche in dramatic terms:

> The situation that faced sea animals when they were compelled to become land animals or perish was the same as that which faced these semi-animals [primordial human creatures], well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure: suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and "suspended". From now on they had to walk on their feet and "bear themselves" whereas hitherto they had been borne by the water: a dreadful heaviness lay upon them. They felt unable to cope with the simplest undertakings; in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, those unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their "consciousness", their weakest and most fallible organ! I believe there has never been such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden misconfort - and at the same time the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humour them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications.[54]

Nietzsche depicts the metamorphosis process which man underwent at this decisive

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[53] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., P: 57.

[54] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Vintage Books, New York, 1962, Second Essay, section 16.

turning point of his history as a 'serious illness' bringing about the breaking down of his former instinct-structure. Nevertheless, the apparatus of imaginary concepts devised in order to branch man off his instinctive former guides did not find their way smoothly into human nature. The old instincts have not vanished altogether in favour of conscious processes of drive-reduction. Strong residues of them survived the course of "de-naturalization" and "deification" of man and profoundly affected 'the specific direction taken in the development of major portions of [his] spiritual life.'[55] Instincts, desires, and impulses, inhibited from discharging themselves outwardly, have turned inward, digging within the internality of man 'the blind spot' of the soul. Out of this process of internalization emerged 'the bad conscience' and the phenomenon of the 'ascetic ideals' as sublimated forms of an undisrupted fundamental instinct-structure. Hence, human suffering has not been curtailed; it has simply been deepened. Its perpetuation, caused by a surreptitious functioning of unsettled instincts, tends to exercise a negative and self-destructive impact upon human life:

> All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward - this is what I call the internalization of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul". The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was inhibited. Those fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom... brought about that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction - all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the "bad conscience"... But thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering of man, of himself - the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past, as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto... On the other hand, the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and pregnant with a future that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered.[56]

Although modern humanity has been forged according to the instructions of a morality grown out of the spirit of resentment, Nietzsche is far from supposing that 'the warrior-aristocratic culture', based upon the unrestrained discharge of the most immediate instincts, is preferable to the triumphant 'priestly-aristocratic culture' in which the fundamental instinct-structure of human nature is sublimated into the lofty heights of a

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[55] Cf. R. Schacht, *Of Morals and Menschen*, cit., p. 441.

[56] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, cit., Second Essay, section 16.

spiritual life:

> It was on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire depth and became evil - and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts![57]

If it is true that the phenomenon of resentment has marked deeply the main features of human civilization, it must be acknowledged, however, that with the moralization of man's existence everything in life - human suffering, above all - has been given a metaphysical meaning. [58] And man, it should be remembered, cannot endure the meaninglessness of suffering. He does not repudiate suffering as such, though; he needs rather to be shown a purpose of his suffering. Christian morality, by placing all suffering under the perspective of guilt, has just filled the existential void into which man has been plunged. No matter that its interpretation of human suffering has brought about other suffering, deeper, more inward, and more life-destructive. Even in the most grudging aversion to life, in the most obstinate will to nothingness is still the will to power at work.

Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spiritual dimension that Christianity has introduced into it. The priestly moral order has reared individuals who, being denied the true reaction of deeds against their enemies, have compensated themselves with an imaginary revenge.[59] At the roots of Christian morality lies a slave revolt in morals. Unlike the master morality, which develops from a positive affirmation of itself, the slave morality arises out of a "No" to a hostile external world. The reactive character of the slave morality seems to swing Nietzsche's balance in favour of the master morality. In fact, a positive and affirmatory, though instinctive and pre-reflective, drive to happiness and pleasure underlines the latter's way of life, whereas the existence of the weak rests artificially upon the self-deceptive pronouncement of their being happy and good by fleeing from life. Yet, in constructing a typology of morals on genealogical foundations, Nietzsche is not arguing for a restoration of a pre-Christian morality. To advocate a return to the pagan aristocracy of

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[57] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., Second Essay, section 6.

[58] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 132.

[59] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, cit., First Essay, section 10.

the blond beast would in fact mean to ignore the recognition that humanity as a moral species is the result of a historical evolution. The slave revolt in morals has deepened the human soul. This is a historical achievement, a genuine attainment in human development, not a mere illusion.

What the human type has built up and accumulated in the course of his evolution cannot dissipate altogether. All the qualitative changes in human nature take place on the basis of an existential platform handed down from history. The inherited form according to which the human type has been historically shaped prefigures 'logically' the direction and circumscribes 'a priori' the horizons within which further changes in human nature are bound to occur in the future.[60] Therefore, no inexplicable and inscrutable gap lies on the path of history. If sometimes epochal events appear to break up unbridgeable discontinuities along its way, it is merely because the circumstances and conditions under which these events take place are absolutely contingent. Nietzsche does not envisage a new type of being that would take over mankind in the succession of species for the simple reason that the human being is itself a conclusion. Rather, his problem is 'what type of human being one ought to breed, ought to will, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future.'[61]

This more valuable type, he underlines, has indeed already existed, but as an accident, as an exception, never as willed. As Ansell-Pearson demonstrates, 'what Nietzsche demands is that humanity overcome itself once again by incorporating and transfiguring all that has been necessary and educative in human development so far in order to reach a higher state of nobility founded on a conscious "second innocence" of joy and self-affirmation. Such a synthesis of master morality and slave morality into something higher is no easy task, but then Nietzsche does not pretend otherwise. In

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[60] In accounting for Nietzsche's philosophy of history, I employ the categories of dialectic and teleology in order to explain the historical transition from the master type to the overman *via* the slave type. Against the postmodern reading of *Genealogy*, I assume that Nietzsche sees the historical content not as a miscellany of accidental facts but as a coherent whole within which the genealogical method detects tendencies to which facts point. This hypothesis does not imply that history has a definite end. The teleological character of history is not assumed a priori but emerges at the conclusion of a hermeneutical study in which possibilities sedimented in the past are resurfaced and projected into the future. In this perspective, dialectic is the only method capable of capturing the course of history as a process in which man actualizes his potentialities and shapes his life according to the notion of reason. That Nietzsche's project of overcoming does not go so far as to place itself outside the horizon of reason is implied by the argument I develop in this chapter and the next

[61] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, cit., P: 3.

order to carry out this task adequately man must learn to know what it means to be beyond *good and evil*, which does not mean beyond *good and bad.*' [62]

VI. Genealogical Critique versus Hermeneutical Circle

In the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche tells us the story of how man became a calculable and regular being by the employment of cruel and tyrannical methods of punishment and social discipline. The development of the faculty of memory enables him to think causally, to operate in terms of means and ends, and to ordain the future in advance. The original impetus to develop inside man a 'reason' and a 'conscience' provided with the capacity to recollect the past and to anticipate the future resides in the social necessity of rendering him reliable. With the aid of the morality of mores and the social straitjacket, man was made uniform and calculable. The result of this process is 'the sovereign individual', an autonomous and supra moral creature endowed with the mastery over himself and over circumstances and nature. This subject's power over its passions has penetrated to such an extent the profoundest depths of the human soul that it has become the dominant instinct. The emergence of conscience has thus broken man's immersion into the passing moment and brought about the phenomenon of responsibility, of a 'long chain of will' among the continuous alteration of circumstances. The sovereign individual, with his own independent protracted will, is both the 'ripest fruit' that emerges at the end of this tremendous process and the 'root', the starting point of a self-overcoming of morality in the epoch of nihilism. The direction which man's re-shaping and sublimation is designed to take is indicated by the teleological pattern that Nietzsche draws throughout his genealogical investigation into the origins of moral values. In this perspective, genealogy diverges from its task of reconstructing how we have become what we are to act as an immanent critique of what we are. The will to power plays the role of principle in the critique by informing surreptitiously the acts of judgement that serve to rationalize the past. The will to power functions in fact as a discriminatory criterion for evaluating the previous moral values so that these are put into an order of rank according to whether they are signs of

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[62] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 133.

ascending life or signs that life is exhausted and degenerating.[63]

The task of the critique based on the principle of the will to power, however, seems to be in contradiction with Nietzsche's acknowledgement that Christian morality, deemed to have promoted impoverishment and degeneration of life, has actually deepened and spiritualised human existence to the point of cultivating a disciplined and autonomous type *Mensch* with the power to control his affects. As long as the revaluation of values and the self-overcoming of morality are performed from a standpoint which is beyond good and evil, they are bound to pass judgement on the past not without taking into account the wider historical context of culture so as to affirm life in its totality, that is both in its ascending and descending phases. [64]

This incoherence at the heart of Nietzsche's thought reflects neither more nor less the contradictions in which contemporary hermeneutics wriggles. It is an appendage of the wider problematic of the circular structure of understanding with which the hermeneutics of the human sciences has to come to terms. Heidegger traces the hermeneutic circle to the temporality of *Dasein*. Given the historicity of our being, he states, all understanding inevitably involves some prejudices. The movement of understanding and interpretation always proceeds by projecting anticipations and expectations about the meaning of the text. It begins with fore-conceptions that are gradually reflected by more suitable ones. The meaning projected for the text as a whole can be confirmed or dismissed only through the working out of the text itself. Notwithstanding this difficulty, the hermeneutical circle, according to Heidegger, is not to be seen as a vicious circle. Rather, it possesses an ontologically positive significance provided that the fore-meanings used in the process of understanding are not utterly arbitrary.[65]

In the light of Heidegger's clarification of the circularity of understanding, it can be said that Nietzsche's conflict outlined above exposes his thinking to the same risk of conceptual collapse as that lurking behind hermeneutic ontology. As the latter oscillates between the philosophico-theoretical claim of the relative validity of all interpretations, functional to the practical exercise of deconstructionism, and the logical necessity of

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[63] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, ibid., p. 106.

[64] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, ibid., p. 107.

[65] Cf. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, cit., pp. 235-240.

discovering a universal medium - language, for instance - of hermeneutical experience, in the same way Nietzsche's genealogical reading of modernity in nihilistic terms cannot elude the dilemma of either being unmasking and ironic, and thus anti-metaphysical, or evaluative and critical, and thus metaphysical. On the one hand, inasmuch as it is confined within the boundaries of hermeneutics, Nietzsche's critique does not involve the ideal of a complete self-transparency of the subject. On the other hand, however, as long as genealogy is to be preserved from declining into a futile and irrelevant exercise of monumental and antiquarian history, it must find a connection between origins and outcome in history, remaining thus a 'variant of teleological history.' [66]

VII. From the Jewish Noble to the Ascetic Scientist: History of the Emergence of the Sovereign Individual

In order to account for the emergence in modernity of a mature and enlightened individual with the capacity for autonomy and self-legislation, Nietzsche sets out to delineate a teleological pattern comprehensive of the whole history up to now of the type *Mensch*. The narrative told in this explanatory framework begins with humanity's exit from a prehistorical condition characterized by a pre-reflective and instinctive mode of behaviour and, through the description of the succession of cultural formations and forms of life, reaches the historical point at which the necessity of obedience to law has become the dominating instinct. The *culmination* of this process is exactly the sovereign individual, a particular creature endowed with the capacity to creatively posit goals.

The slave revolt in morals, with the correlative denaturalization of the natural values, was initiated for Nietzsche by Jewish culture. [67] Originally Yahweh, the God of Israel and God of justice, represented the central explanatory metaphor accounting for the Jewish form of life. It protected its people and decided about their destiny.

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[66] Cf. K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, cit., p. 123. There is no room here to develop further this analysis as well as it is beyond my capacities to resolve this dilemma within the bulk of Nietzsche's *opera omnia*. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to claim for the purposes of this thesis that I tend to presume that Nietzsche possesses a metaphysical system. On this point, cf. J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

[67] For this genealogical reconstruction of the emergence of the sovereign individual, I am totally in debt to D. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 40-42.

Nevertheless, a combination of internal and external circumstances brought about the collapse of Jewish culture. The Jewish nobility and their consciousness of power based upon the superiority of their natural qualities was then supplanted by the creative genius of resentment exhibited by the Jewish priests. These weak creatures subverted the order of rank in Jewish culture by denying the realm of experience and nature and by positing imaginatively a supra natural realm of being. The reification of consciousness along with the inhibition of the instincts to discharge themselves outwardly gave rise to the phenomenon of 'bad conscience'. In a similar way bad conscience emerged in Greek culture. There it was myth, with its deification of the animal in man, that played the role of explanatory metaphor. The noble and the aristocrat had no idea of the consciousness of guilt. They acted pre-reflectively, while their gods, portrayed in anthropomorphic form, took upon themselves the responsibility for their misdeeds. Following the Athenian victory in the Persian wars, Greek myth, in which the exaltation of the instinctive and natural qualities of nobility was embodied, collapsed. The noble, enclosed within the walls of peace and society, could no longer fashion their natural aggressiveness either externally or internally.

The displacement of myth by dialectics, the new explanatory metaphor of Greek culture, is mirrored by the displacement of Aeschylus by Euripides. The actions performed by the characters in Euripides's plays are no longer heroic and tragic. These characters make choices on the basis of accurate knowledge of the consequences of their actions. Therefore, in a context in which the outcome of human actions is made predictable, there can be no kind of tragedy. Euripides' characters act in fact reflectively according to noble principles:

> The significance of Euripides is that his tragedies represent the movement of Greek myth from the realm of the unquestioned to the realm of the questionable and, thereby, set the scene for the displacement of myth by reason.[68]

Euripidean drama is, for Nietzsche, the poetic translation of the Socratic dialogue, and Socrates's 'philosophical-dialectic of truth' is the Greek counterpart of the Jewish 'theological dialectic of sin'. In a world in which the nobility's creative affirmation of instincts has been undermined, Socrates's creative genius of resentment offers them a new redirection and sublimation. Moral judgements are therefore denaturalized while

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[68] Cf. D. Owen, ibid., p. 50.

the concepts of "good" and "just" are severed from the social and material context to which they belong to become objects of dialectic.[69]

Christianity represents a further and more emphatic development of 'bad conscience'. It raises the theological idea of God and the philosophical idea of Good to a higher level of abstraction by universalizing the culturally specific categories of 'Jewish noble' and 'Greek noble'. In other terms, Christianity displaces the source of guilt from the particularity of the noble's instincts structure and redirects it onto the universal category of 'Man' or 'Self'. As a result, within the perspective of Christian morality, the cause of human suffering is no longer attributed to a specific entity which may be ostensively pointed to, but instead is made to reside in a highly abstract consciousness called 'spirit' and in its failure to dominate a similarly abstract sphere of instincts called 'flesh'.

The main achievement of Christian morality is, on Nietzsche's conclusions, that of inscribing the individual within a regime of reflection, interrogation and confession. Yet, the dialogue of the soul with the authority of the divine is not straightforward and direct, but has to be mediated by the figure of the priest. In this sense, the Christian believer is not autonomous; 'he cannot out of himself posit ends at all.'[70] In the articulation of his values he depends upon a priestly judgement.

Renaissance embodies the first attempt in history to overcome Christian morality and perform a revaluation of its values. It is marked by a high sense of scientific consciousness. Disrespectful of authorities, its main concern is with loyalty to truth and unfettering of the individual. But contemporary to the Renaissance is the Reformation, whose prevalent interest is turned to moral practices. The Reformation aims to abolish the authority of the priest and constitute the individual as the judge of himself:

> The reflexivity instituted by the shift in direction of resentment from the noble to the self is hereby deepened insofar as the judgement of the self is displaced from the realm of a priestly judgement to an ongoing regime of self-judgement and is thereby reconstituted as a hermeneutics of self-suspicion.[71]

In the confrontation between Renaissance and Reformation it is the latter that triumphs. The consequence of the affirmation of Protestant asceticism is that bad conscience

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[69] Cf. D. Owen, ibid.
[70] Cf. D. Owen, ibid., p. 55.
[71] Cf. D. Owen, ibid., p. 56.

comes to be further heightened so that the psychological need to overcome both inner and external nature attains a conspicuous drive.

The history of the most recent modernity is therefore a history of translation and sublimation of the Christian morality of truthfulness into a scientific conscience. Whereas the advent of history was inaugurated with the invention of a supra natural realm of being, the latest development of this process in the epoch of nihilism culminates instead in the displacement of God by scientific forms of explanation. Nevertheless, insofar as the scientific will to truth does not transcend the dichotomy of real and apparent worlds, it does still represent for Nietzsche the ascetic ideal in its most spiritual formulation. Faith in the metaphysical and absolute value of truth ties modern science indissolubly to the phenomenon of asceticism. But what happens if we overcome the opposition of real and apparent world and abolish the real world as the universal ground of the will to power?

Nihilism is what emerges when the will to truth is subjected to critical scrutiny and the value of science put into question. According to Nietzsche, we are living in the epoch of nihilism. This condition is not ineluctable, however, and humanity, at least potentially, does indeed possess the cultural instruments to transcend it. The possibility of overcoming nihilism rests upon a positive affirmation of the realm of becoming. The results of the genealogical analysis suggest the sense and direction of the exit on the basis of the accomplishments bequeathed by the past. According to Nietzsche, in the master morality the nobility developed their capacity to posit goals for themselves throughout the internalization of the social pathos of distance. It was the unreflective recognition of their power to command goals and tasks for the slaves that grounded their ability to command goals and tasks for themselves. Thus, within the culture of pagan aristocracy, the pathos of inner distance was founded on the pathos of social distance. This internalization of the social order of ranks led the noble to predicate an affirmation of the relationship between self and world.

The slave revolt in morals repudiates the pathos of social distance. By proclaiming that all souls are equal before God, it overthrows the social order of ranks; and, by postulating a metaphysical beyond along with devaluing the world to the status of an "apparent" being, it negates the relationship between self and world. The pathos of inner distance is then predicated upon a pathos of metaphysical distance. What constitutes the pathos of metaphysical distance is reflective adherence to the set of

values defined by slave morality. Christianity deepens the inner pathos of distance as the individual's ability to command itself in relation to a goal, while Reformation heightens it to the level of an immediate relationship between God and the soul. With the death of God and the advent of nihilism the pathos of metaphysical distance also collapses. Therefore, in order to overcome nihilism, a new pathos of inner distance other than social or metaphysical has to be constituted. Nietzsche foresees that this new pathos is dwelling in the soul of the sovereign individual, an individual endowed not only with the capacity to command himself in accordance with an heteronomous set of values, but also with the creative power to determine the values for himself. Here is the artistic pathos of distance.

VIII. Conclusion

The philosophy of immanence, as implicit in Nietzsche's work, seems to develop as a sort of counter-Enlightenment project designed to overcome the false Kantian distinctions between the noumenal and phenomenal realms and to constrain man within the boundaries of his empirical existence. Nietzsche believes neither that there is an end at the culmination of history which human beings teleologically pursue by giving rationally founded assent to the command of the categorical imperative, nor that moral action can ever be effective in transforming the world.

Yet, though rejecting the notion of moral law along with the coercive implications involved in it, he still retains as valid Kant's idea of Enlightenment both as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" and as capacity for autonomy and self-legislation. Accordingly, he undertakes a critique of reason not in order to circumscribe the theoretical and practical limits of its law-making activity, but to the purpose of assessing the value of the same ideals of knowledge and morality. The task he sets himself is then to articulate a genealogical analysis of the synthetic a priori judgements of reason, both in their theoretical and moral application, as well as to deconstruct modern belief in the existence of a transcendental and a-historical ego governing the course of events in the world.

What Nietzsche primarily points to, indeed, is ‘a reconceptualization of the notion

of autonomy' by disconnecting it from 'the idea of a universalisable moral law.'[72] Thus, he discovers that at the end of modernity a new type of mature individual is emerging endowed with unity of style, that is with the capacity to organize, by virtue of a set of goals, the chaotic multiplicity of competing drives under a leading one. However, in order to become truly sovereign, this individual lacks the capacity to take on the responsibility of positing a goal for himself. Through a process of displacement of responsibility, he thereby postulates fictional authorities as transcendent sources of legislation. Hence, to the rules emanated from their divine domain, he devotedly gives his obedience.

The further and ultimate step that Nietzsche sets about to take is therefore to sublimate and heighten the moral agent into an a-moral and creative artist gifted with the ability to determine his own goals. No irrational and a-logical leap seems to be involved in such proceeding. On the contrary, though the activity of this autonomous and self-legislating individual is bound to respond exclusively to the demands of the will to power, the perspectives disclosed by his interpretive work are not arbitrary, but materialize out of the hermeneutical interplay of historical consciousness.

Nietzsche's unmasking critique of reason appears not to go so far as to place itself outside the horizon of reason. Reason is still the ground upon which rest both the foundations of its critical exercise - namely, the 'philosophical theory' of the will to power - and the inner structure of its genealogical inquiries. Thus, at the conclusion of their itinerary, the Hyperboreans do not give up philosophy. Their declaration of proximity to an indeterminate 'beyond', far from amounting to a flight from reality, is in fact the proclamation of a deeper immersion into it. Nevertheless, insofar as such a penetration is designed to enhance the creative power of the modern deconstructed subjectivity, Nietzsche's philosophy faces a new dilemma: is the existence of the artist still possible in a disenchanted world from which myth has been banned? Or, having overcome the age of nihilism, is there still enough room for history? Do not the aesthetics of production, which celebrate the transitory and dynamic, the spontaneity of the moment and the suspension of the present, take over historical consciousness to the extent of making it explode into an infinity of meaningless fragments to be managed merely by judgements of taste?

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[72] Cf. David Owen, cit., p. 31.

I will argue in chapter VII that the incapacity to escape these dilemmas undermines Adorno's method of negative dialectics. Meanwhile, let us analyse in depth the essential traits of the special individual to whom Nietzsche appeals in order to take man out of the age of nihilism.

4

ZARATHUSTRA'S DOUBLE WILL

The Vision of the Overman and the Riddle of Eternal Return

I. Introduction

The image of the sovereign individual as the autonomous subject of the modern age endowed with the creative capacity to reevaluate moral values begins to take shape in a comprehensive way in the character of Zarathustra. Zarathustra is a complex and contradictory figure: he is a wanderer and a hermit, a philosopher and a prophet, a visionary and an analyst. He has a double will: one will clings to man, the other drives him high towards the overman. He teaches the doctrine of the overman and the eternal return. The overman, with his demand for continuous self-overcoming, implies a linear conception of time, while eternal return of the same implies circularity. How these two opposite teachings can be reconciled has always been a puzzling dilemma among Nietzsche's scholars.

In this chapter, I argue that the teaching of the overman and the doctrine of eternal return are strictly entwined. I will demonstrate this by following the tortuous existential itinerary of their herald, Zarathustra, whose primary concern is to offer to man the ideal of something higher beyond himself susceptible of conferring a meaning upon his shattered and fragmented existence.

Despite, or maybe by virtue of, the elusive nature of his identity, Zarathustra emerges as a philosopher of the future. What he announces, however, does not unfold as a further expansion of the modern teaching of progress. The future he longs for exhibits a model of human perfectibility which does not meet the egalitarian and democratic criteria of humanist Enlightenment. Indeed, the actual content of the post-nihilistic era Zarathustra points to is not disclosed in any of his innumerable discourses. Still, I assume that the 'post-modern age' he envisages will promote values which are in conflict with the predominant values of the modern age. On the other hand, one has to recognize that, in order for the Socratic-Platonic-Christian-Modern tradition to be deconstructed, Zarathustra

must offer, somehow, an account of the opposing values on the basis of which modern consciousness is supposed to undertake the labour of internal self-destruction and transcend nihilism. Therefore, by highlighting the opposition between the last man and the overman, I will draw a few outlines of what a post-nihilistic era might look like. The whole scenario, however, will remain nebulous. What, instead, will appear distinctly clear is that, for Zarathustra, there is only one world, the one in which we live, and within it there is no possibility of a definitive break with the history that modern culture has unfolded so far.

The chapter is structured as follows: section II offers an analysis of the project of the overman as it is presented by Nietzsche in *Zarathustra* Prologue and Part I. I argue that in this segment of the book Zarathustra sets out to announce the ideal of the overman as the only counterforce available in the epoch of nihilism to neutralize the process of decadence of modern man and prevent the debasement of the human species. I also contend that the coming of the overman is seen by Nietzsche not as an imminent event and that Zarathustra is a mere prophet who denounces the failure of our civilization and poses the demand for a greater elevation of man.

The process of overcoming nihilism and giving new meaning to the earth is achieved by re-interpreting the historical situation in which modern man is placed and by developing the potentialities present in it. For Zarathustra, redemption must be free of the spirit of revenge towards the past. Accordingly, the ideal of the overman does not point to some novel future reminiscent of the religious longing for an eschatological outcome of history. In this respect, I argue in section III that the doctrine of eternal return, if understood in voluntaristic and not ontological terms, enforces the ideal of the overman by inviting man to pursue empowerment of life within his own historical existence, that is through an act of affirmation of the becoming of time.

Finally, in the last section, I criticize Lampert's dualistic interpretation of Zarathustra's teachings of the overman and eternal return. Against his reading of Nietzsche's text, I contend that in the course of his spiritual itinerary Zarathustra does not give up the ideal of the overman but vindicates a perspective of overcoming devoid of the mystifications of eschatology. To abandon the idea of a transcendent exit of history does not mean to renounce to a possibility of fulfilment beyond the present historical conditions.

II. *Zarathustra's* Prologue: The Project of the Overman

Nietzsche's Zarathustra's incipit features the forty-year-old hermit and philosopher addressing the rising sun from outside his cave high in the mountain. There in the wilderness Zarathustra has been in solitude for ten years, but now he has grown weary of the wisdom accumulated. 'Like a bee that has gathered too much honey',[1] an internal impelling necessity spurs him to descend to mankind to distribute the fruits of his overflowing knowledge.

Zarathustra's desire to go down to his fellow men reflects the development in his spirit of a transfiguration which has metamorphosed the traditional ascetic figure of Persian religion into a sort of profane sacerdotalist who celebrates the intrinsic value of the earth and body. On his way down the mountain, Zarathustra comes across another hermit, an old saint who warns him against mankind's readiness to receive a superior teaching. This encounter is instructive, for it highlights a fundamental difference between the two divergent ways of experiencing the adventure of solitude. Both the old saint and Zarathustra have turned away from men out of a disgust with their imperfections, but, whereas the solitary saint has replaced his love of mankind with the love of God, Zarathustra, well aware of the death of God as an epochal event, has not abandoned men for good but is returning to them to bring the supreme gift of a new ideal.

Ten years of solitude are experienced by Zarathustra as a retreat from the world designed to discover a new meaning for the earth following mankind's loss of the belief in God. In Zarathustra's hope, the higher ideal of the overman, that is a type of man which emerges from a will to complete modern man's imperfections, should instill a burning enthusiasm into the latter's uninspired soul under the ashes of which the fire of life has been extinguished.

Zarathustra's teaching of the overman as the meaning of the earth represents the project of a future redemption of mankind, considered as a species, from its general demise. Zarathustra believes that man is something that should be overcome.[2] The transition from a lower species to a higher one spells in his view the evolutionary pattern of life. All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves. Once man was a worm and then, through the evolutionary chain of the species, he has made the way to

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[1] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1961, Prologue 1.

[2] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., Prologue 3.

his present configuration by advancing along a progressive series of intermediary stages. Therefore, it would be shameful as well as a source of embarrassment if man now, disregardful of the linear sequence of evolution, deemed himself as the terminus of this process. There is still too much in man of the worm and ape to be superseded, Zarathustra proclaims. Even the wisest among men are only a discord and hybrid of brutal nature and lofty spirituality. The overman, in Zarathustra's envision, represents the step forward of man towards something higher, the vision of a future achievement of man beyond his current standards and determinations. In this respect, the overman is the postulation of an ethical, though not 'moral' imperative, that is the deontic positing of an exceeding augmentation of man's qualities and characteristics which man can, and should, become. In a world deprived of any otherworldly dreams, the ideal of the overman, if taken up and willed by humanity as the goal towards which the evolutionary process tends, unfolds its liberating capacity to bestow upon the otherwise meaningless earth a new meaning. [3]

Zarathustra's urge for man to create something above and beyond himself, however, does not appeal to artificial experiments of biological evolution. As Whitlock points out, 'it is Zarathustra's message in the Prologue and throughout that *man has not yet become all he can within his present biological constitution.* Nor would there be any guarantee that physiological evolution would mean spiritual evolution (- indeed, this is the very problem with man). Thus evolution is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the *Uebermensch.* Modern man must will the overman in *this* body and on *this* earth: there is still much to be done with man outside of genetic considerations.'[4]

On the basis of anthropological considerations supposedly combined with genealogical analyses of the evolution of human beings from their origin up to the emergence of the sovereign individual, Zarathustra has come to acquire the conclusion that man is still the minimal man. Incapable of coping with his suffering, man has diverted his vital energies away from earthly and bodily things in order to cherish imaginary worlds inhabited by God and angelic creatures. Cultivation of reason and virtue, the search for happiness and justice, and nourishment of pity have contaminated human nature to such an extent that modern men esteem 'the bowels of the Inscrutable more highly than the

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[3] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1986, p. 19.

[4] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, Peter Lang, New York, 1990, p. 104.

meaning of the earth.'[5] No sooner man becomes aware of his shortcomings and feels disgust at the mediocrity imposed on his life by the postulates of moral experience, than he rediscovers the imperative of remaining loyal to the earth so as to prepare the conditions to arrest his downfall. Were this occur, it would be the hour when man has interiorized the ideal of the overman and determined himself to will to become this higher being.

Nevertheless, despite the demand for the overman's coming, he is still a long way off and his actual appearance is left by Zarathustra to an indeterminate future belonging to a sort of humanity yet to come. The task which Zarathustra sets out to accomplish in the *Prologue* is simply that of preparing the way to the overman by initiating a historical project which will culminate in the advent of the overman. That this is Zarathustra's project is however controversial. Lampert, for instance, denies that Zarathustra heralds the coming of the overman on exegetic grounds concerning a dramatic shift in Nietzsche's thought between the writing up of *Zarathustra* Part I and the elaboration of Part III. He claims that, despite the fact that Zarathustra presents the overman as an evolutionary phenomenon in Part I, this image is subsequently abandoned in Part III. On Lampert's reading, the beginning of Zarathustra's course should be measured by its end, 'for he begins as the teacher of the superman but ends as the teacher of eternal return. The first teaching requires a linear concept of time, with the meaning of time passage dependent on the future achievement of those who have contempt for the past. But the final teaching seems to contradict the notion that time is linear, that the past is worthy only of contempt, and that the future alone can be the ground of meaning. Interpretation of the superman teaching requires that it be reconciled with the teaching of eternal return.'[6] I will return to this point later on when Lampert's interpretation is disclosed to a full extent and becomes the central motif of my analysis. At the present stage, I want to focus further on Zarathustra's presentation of the overman in the *Prologue*.

Insofar as the teaching of self-overcoming is concerned, Zarathustra does not place the site of the overman in a platonic transcendent world, but depicts his traits along the lines of a creature living on this earth:

> Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman - a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and

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[5] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., Prologue 3.

[6] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 21.

> staying still. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*.[7]

The abyss over which man is suspended represents the ever-present possibility of man failing in the traverse from his animal past to his superhuman future destiny. Only if he holds firmly to the ideal of the overman as the purpose giving value to his life, will he manage successfully to preserve a balance across the dangerous path towards his end. Man is not an end in himself, but a means to a higher being the accomplishment of which makes his present imperfect condition justifiable. As he is still now, all-too-human, he is worthless. But in his will to achieve more and overcome the comforts and stasis of modern bourgeois philistinism[8], man has to cease targeting otherworldly goals and constrain his *telos* within the horizon of the earthly world.

The overman is a kind of man who one day may live. His existence, if *de facto* actualized, would constitute a further advancement in the progress of the species. To this end, the men who for the sake of surpassing the minimally human seek to pave the way to the coming of the overman must will to perish. By striving for the overman to come into existence, they must will their own downfall. This going-down, as Zarathustra puts it, manifests itself in the shape of a sacrifice to the earth, so that 'the earth may one day belong to the overman.'[9]

In accordance with the aims of his project, Zarathustra reverses the classical conception of virtue. He writes off values such as moderation, resolution of conflict, or rational agreement [10] from the shibboleth of the moral register and delivers a tablet of beatitudes treasuring the hyper-sensitive strife to surmount the barriers still dividing man from his longed-for ideal. Therefore, virtue becomes, on Zarathustra's transvaluation, the passionate search to complete and improve oneself. This demands, on the part of the subject who possesses it, a spirit of sacrifice centred more in the heart than in reason:

> I love him who is of a free spirit and a free heart: thus his head is only the bowels of his

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[7] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., Prologue 4.

[8] The expression "bourgeois philistinism" was widely used in nineteenth century German literature. It appears often, for instance, in the early narrative of Thomas Mann. It denotes a way of life which, while being incapable of conceiving higher ideals, dwells upon the comforts of everyday life.

[9] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., Prologue 4.

[10] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., p. 41.

heart, but his heart drives him to his downfall.[11]

Zarathustra summarizes the condition of the minimal man under the locution *last man*. This expression denotes the prototype of nihilism, that is the present epoch in which man indulges in self-contentment at the comforts provided by an existence led within the limits of moderation and composure and keeps himself away from the strenuous extremes of virulence and overexertion. The last man is the undifferentiated member of the herd who has given up the struggle to excel and has pledged himself to the paltriness of petty pleasures and unburdening suffering. He seeks only entertainments that do not exhaust him or make the string of his vital tension twang. Incapable of conceiving anything higher than the satisfaction of his most urgent needs, Whitlock explains, 'the ego of the last man becomes the endpoint and meaning of history in his own mind, for all knowledge and value is already contained in his immediate monadic consciousness.'[12]

On Whitlock's reading, Zarathustra prefigures the advent of nihilism as the logical conclusion of Christianity. Wars and apocalyptic catastrophes will lead to a post-Christian era characterized by a general loss of belief in God and by a progressive secularization of religions. In this era, the human species will dirempt into two sub-species: the last man and the overman. The choice between these two 'values' or 'ways of life' articulates the fate facing man in a proximate future. The prevalence of the last man will built a kind of humanity drifting aimlessly through the historical process, while the affirmation of the overman will give to humanity a meaningful goal over and beyond itself.[13]

Both the spiritual nihilism of the last man into which humanity may degenerate and the ideal of the overman which humanity should strife after represent for Zarathustra two different 'forms of atheism' [14] surviving the death of God. They finish up the spectrum of possible shapes available in the future into which man can still be forged by the malleability of his nature. In rejecting any gods with the power to manage human destiny, the last man reaches for a technological mastery of nature and shakes off the fear at the unpredictable and obscure forces of chance. The atheism of the last man manifests itself

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[11] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., Prologue 4. On the theme of Zarathustra's suspicion of logical arguments, see G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils Maria,* cit., p. 44.

[12] Cf. G. Whitlock, ibid., p. 46.

[13] Cf. G. Whitlock, ibid., Preface.

[14] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 24.

in a sort of humanism which pursues the extinction of scarcity and inequality throughout the findings achieved by the science of nature.

By counterposing the teaching on the overman to the spiritual decadence of the last man, Zarathustra intends to denounce the dangers looming over the enlightenment brought about by this modern figure of human progress. Zarathustra fears that, under the universal sway of the last man, intellectual uniformity and cultural homogenization might replace the vital tension for struggle and self-overcoming. These would produce a debasement of the human species which would result in frustrating those creative qualities within the spirit which constantly push man further towards something higher. Since the last man sees himself as the most perfect accomplishment arisen out of the line of historical progress and evolution, his affirmation announces the appearance of a generation of herd men without ideals and aspirations, but comfortably settled down in the enjoyment of material well-being. From the vantage point of its achievements, the modern age surveys all that has gone before to come to proclaim the technological domination of nature ensured by the last man as the endpoint towards which the whole history of humanity has been directed.

On the basis of this overview, history is perceived to tend towards the last man. The global spread of his technological products are seen to be already, and ineluctably, under way. Within such a context, Zarathustra's appeal to modern man to turn away from his pragmatic and scientific culture based on control of nature and reach for the overman proves to be vain. It aims in fact to deflect the course of history from its spontaneous path and give back to man the promise of a wonderland of abundance and plentifulness. But why and how should man experience uneasiness at present-day civilization if he feels at home in it? Lampert's answer is that also 'the project of the superman implies a praise of progress. But the critique of the last man separates that praise from much of what has counted as progress in the modern world and raises the question of where Zarathustra stands with respect to the characteristic modern teaching of progress. An adequate answer to this question cannot be puzzled out of the oracular utterances of the prologue, nor does it need to be, for Zarathustra will later unfold a comprehensive view of human history that makes clear the ways in which he embraces progress - the progress of inquiry, for instance, while refusing as madness unrestrained progress in the alteration of nature.'[15]

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[15] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 26.

Yet, the Prologue contains a few indications of the way in which Zarathustra conceives the route to progress. This route is described as a gradual advancement to the overman. After Zarathustra delivers the speech on the last man in the market place, a tightrope walker emerges from a little door and proceeds across the rope stretched over the square where the people addressed by Zarathustra are gathered. But as the tightrope is halfway through his course, a jester dressed in motley clothes appears out of the same door and follows him. The jester's steps are fast and within a short while he catches up with the tightrope walker, lets out a devilish cry and springs over him. His insolent action baffles the walker who, exposed to public shame, loses his balance and falls, crashing at Zarathustra's feet. To the shattered man near to death Zarathustra whispers a few words of consolation. Then the tightrope walker confides his terror of being dragged to hell, but Zarathustra tells him that such an afterlife does not exist. There is no devil and no hell, the soul dies even before the body. The walker replies that, if Zarathustra speaks the truth, then life itself is worthless because the man who dies leaves nothing in leaving life. Zarathustra replies that life is worthy anyhow, even in absence of an eschatological sense of history. He also shows his appreciation of the walker's courage, for, by behaving dangerously, he has raised himself above the undifferentiated mass in the crowd , thus emerging as a model of loyalty to an ideal alternative to that of undisturbed contentment. Out of respect for the example the walker represents, Zarathustra will bury him with his own hands.

On the other hand, Zarathustra's contempt at the jester's reckless performance derives from his disgust at the purposeless deeds of modern man whose patchwork nature - exemplified by the jester's bright clothing - has deprived life of any principle of unity. The jester aims only to entertain the crowd and win its favour. Insofar as he wishes to cross over symbolically to the overman, his attempt is naive and foolishly audacious. He is one who believes that man can be skipped over and overcome by a single leap.[16] On the contrary, the transition to the overman is to be undertaken and practised by Zarathustra as a going through a series of metamorphoses each stage of which is a source of tribulation and suffering. Unlike the philologist-gravediggers who are concerned only with dead history,[17] Zarathustra seeks wisdom out of spiritual poverty but combined with vitality. In

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[16] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., p. 48.

[17] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., Prologue 8.

his effort to break the old table of values and go beyond the average man, he leaves behind destruction. His undertaking is not painless:

> I make for my goal, I go my way; I shall leap over the hesitating and the indolent. Thus may my going-forward be their going-down.[18]

Going down implies perishing, dissolution of former structures of life and establishment of new, enhancing ones. The words quoted above are spoken by Zarathustra as the sun stands at noon and an eagle sweeps through the sky in wide circles letting a snake coiled around its neck hang under it.[19] This image, borrowed from Greek mythology where the eagle is the animal of Zeus and symbolizes pride, light, and elevation, while the snake is the animal of Apollo and symbolizes cleverness, adherence to the earth, and darkness, condenses Zarathustra's desire to overcome the old dualism of light and darkness, heaven and earth, good and evil.[20] In the new figurative cosmology envisaged by Zarathustra, the sun is kept low within the horizon of perceptible things. Rather than being lifted to the zenith of a permanent source of light and being, it is depicted as a mere star harmoniously integrated into the system of celestial spheres. It rises and sets, comes up and goes down, brings light and disappears to give way to darkness. The ascension and decline of the sun's trajectory reproduces the parabola of life itself which comes into being and passes away in a perennial succession of forms and modes.

The very essence of Zarathustra's universe contains in peaceful unity dimensions of existence which the philosophical tradition has separated into an irreconcilable dualism. Overcoming means bringing together these opposites. Man will transform himself into a being beyond good and evil only by going through his animal nature. In order to become a complete human, that is to embody within his present constitution the eagle and the snake, he has to rediscover and re-evaluate the instinctual part of his "body" so as to make it match with the most refined and spiritualised features of his 'soul'.[21]

The act of going across the bridge to the overman cannot override the civilizing and humanizing process through which man has undergone while advancing to his actual configuration. Endowed with a sense of the historical past, the spirit of man has to follow

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[18] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., Prologue 9.

[19] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., Prologue 10.

[20] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 29.

[21] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., I, 4, pp. 61-63.

a developmental path leading by dialectical necessity to the over human act of creating new values. This will to overcome, stemming from a spiritual tension, is described by Nietzsche as a kind of cruelty which refuses the comforts of any traditional knowledge and takes upon itself the burden of pursuing an hitherto unexplored wisdom. Spirit, strung by high tension between conflicting poles, is driven to transfigure itself into a sequence of figures whose ultimate exit will release it from the condition of radical nihilism into which it is currently writhing. Since the spirit recognizes the present system of the highest values as no longer tenable and feels to be unable to posit another system of values marked by the same brand of "beyondness" and "in-it selfness", it submits itself to a process of transformation designed to restore self-fulfilment 'free of rage against the past... and therefore not in need of a future to redeem it.' [22]

The first metamorphosis features the spirit taking on the semblances of a camel who carries the heaviest things and hurries into the desert. What is hard to bear and overwhelms the fatigue of the camel is the morality of custom that he bears on his back with joyful attitude as well as sense of responsibility. In the isolation and loneliness of the desert the second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit here becomes a lion and wants to be a master over his own surroundings.[23] The transfiguration of the spirit from camel to lion is required by the reverent nature of the camel. Though the latter is a heroic spirit capable of bearing much weight, he does not possess the pride and audacity of the lion to challenge traditional values and conventional standards of morality. To be lifted from the consciousness of his unbearable weight, the camel has to metamorphose himself into a lion and destroy all pre-formed and pre-existing values. The desert into which the camel has fled is in fact checked by a string of 'Thou Shalt' imposed on its territory by the law-giving dragon called Moses. The camel, feeling that this moral constraint has to be fought, becomes lion. The spirit of the lion destroys everything. No respect for tradition or sense of sacrilege contain his fury against what repulses him. The lion says 'I will' where God, Moses, or any other moral authority has decreed 'Thou Shalt'. The lion does not let himself be bound by any master. He seeks pure annihilation. His freedom is negative. Yet, the lion is against everything. He destroys all boundaries and fixed categories, but is unable to provide himself with the positive freedom to perform some affirmative action. Thereby, the spirit of the lion has to

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[22] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 35.

[23] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* cit., I, 1, p. 54.

be transfigured into the spirit of a child. The destructive act of the lion has left the spirit homeless, floating around in search of a resort. Once the spirit has overthrown all masters and gods and has nothing more to bring down, it cannot remain indefinitely in its own blessed self-isolation. In order to nourish its feeling of power, it has to create something new upon which to wield its power. The child, in the innocence and forgetfulness of its nature, creates a new world. It is 'a new beginning', 'a first motion', 'a sacred Yes.[24] The child draws 'a new geography of the spirit'[25], a map of spiritual territories where hope for the height and light is rooted down in the deep and dark.[26]

Zarathustra's striving for self-overcoming is distinguished from the aspirations of the teachers of Christian virtue for what is higher. The sages and hermits of the modern age seek the good-in-itself not for its own sake, but as a means to escape from the sorrows of life and attain repose of the spirit and peace. Virtue, for Zarathustra, is instead possession of one great passion for an ideal to the service of which one commits one's entire being. Zarathustra does not scatter his personality into a myriad of fragmented entities each devoted to a different small virtue, but strives to bring the multiplicity of his inner discordant forces under the ruling of one commanding passion. No eternal reward will compensate his suffering. Passion is not grounded in rationality, nor in any other universal imperative. Rather, passion springs out of a natural drive. Nevertheless, in spite of the irrationality of its origin, one passion is autonomously chosen by the individual so as it acts as a principle of moral law.

On the other hand, the spiritual life of man is nothing but the projection of animal drives into a realm of the imagination which is dehumanized and regarded as existing in its own right. The body and its senses, nature and the earth make up the soil upon which all supernatural things grow. They are the underlying principle of all reality. Zarathustra attributes the emergence of the religious consciousness to weariness of the body and weakness of the will. On his account, when men are not sufficiently strong and naturally well-disposed to life, they escape from it by taking flight into an afterworld cleared of the sorrows and pains of this world.

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[24] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 55.

[25] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., p. 62.

[26] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., I, 8, pp. 69-71.

The demise of God, however, does not extinguish Zarathustra's love for mankind, since he recreates his love by striving after the ideal of the overman. As the religious consciousness is unmasked in its deceptive devices and afterworldness is disguised in its physical and all-too-human foundations, Zarathustra's bringing to humanity the gift of the overman has the therapeutical effect of curing disillusionment. Out of this anthropological perspective, man comes in fact to know that he himself is the creator of God as well as the measure of value and that through a Dionysian metamorphosis of spirit he can still exercise his 'divine power' of creating the world.

To preside over the physical universe is the body itself, a creative force endowed with intelligence and purposiveness. Matter as such is, in Zarathustra's view, a sort of teleological activity which organizes clashing drives within the organism under a coherent system of 'laws' and 'reasons'. Zarathustra calls the body 'the Self', a 'mighty command' and 'unknown sage'. The self lives in the body, he is the body. The fundamental motive of his activity is the wish to enhance the power of life. The body wants to create beyond itself[27]. Also the spirit is an ectoplasm of the body. It is a tool in the service of more life, 'one more level in the progressive creativity of life.'[28] And even the despisers of the body, who turn away from life and desire their own destruction, want to create beyond themselves. But they have lost the strength for that and, as a result, have grown envious of the success and superiority of others:

> And therefore you [despisers of the body] are now angry with life and with the earth. An unconscious envy lies in the sidelong glance of your contempt. I do not go your way, you despisers of the body! You are not bridges to the Supermen! [29]

Despite the fact that he is a hermit and is moved by a religious sensibility, Zarathustra rejects the teaching of those religious moralists who see the body as a source of moral corruption and a cause of inhibition for spiritual elevation. He reverses the spiritualist position of the metaphysical tradition and places the body, both in its all-encompassing expansion and in the more specific condensed form in the individual, at the centre of the universe. As Whitlock puts it, 'the body, with its stages of self-overcoming, is the principle for understanding life, and its highest creation is the basis for the highest values of man.

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[27] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., I, 4, p.63.

[28] Cf. G Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., p. 70.

[29] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., I, 4, p. 63.

The highest creation of the human organism, though, is the individual in which every level, every process of the organism is in its healthiest state - and that individual is the *overman*.'[30]

Zarathustra exhorts man to depart from what is nearest , that is the average man, and pursue that which is most distant, the overman. Hitherto humanity has been chasing a thousand goals, for there have been a thousand peoples. The one goal which may weld humanity into a unity is still lacking.[31] Zarathustra reports that on his travels all over the world he has found that there is no greater power on earth than good and evil. A table of values hangs over every people. Every people estimates and evaluates, and the result of their evaluations is codified in a system of norms which defines the line between good and evil, what is praiseworthy and what is not. No people can do without evaluating, for valuation is the act through which each people differentiates itself from the others and acquires its own identity. Moreover, the sense of good and evil represents the ethical standard according to which meaning and value are bestowed upon the world. Without a table of values that each people places above itself as an archetype of the highest good, life would be meaningless and purposeless. To trace back the succession of tablets of value alternating across history means therefore to map the progress of the peoples over the hindrances of their natural or biological constitution.

A table of good and evil expresses the history of a people's spirit. It is 'the voice of its will to power'[32] and of its driving force of life. The history of a people is littered by a chain of overcomings whose achievements mark its triumph over the other peoples. And the crystallization of the process of revaluation into a code of laws sums up the essential features shared by the members of this people that allow it to excel in wealth and strength. However, the emergence of the individual in the modern age has fundamentally changed the way in which new tablets of value are to be created:

> A change in values - that means a change in the creators of values. He who has to be a creator always has to destroy. Peoples were the creators at first; only later were individuals creators. Indeed, the individual himself is still the latest creation.[33]

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[30] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., p. 71.

[31] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., I, 16, p. 86.

[32] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., p. 84.

[33] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., I, 15, p. 85.

So far all the peoples have grounded their notions of good and evil on a metaphysical principle of natural or divine sort. But now, given that what transcends human understanding has been recognized as untenable, loyalty to the ancestral absolutes is withering away. And, with it, the same notion of 'people' as a compact unity is shattered. As a consequence, in order to overcome present-day fragmentation and rescue mankind from the triumph of the last man, a new people must be created. But, for this people to be generated, a creator is needed. Yet, under conditions of modernity, only the individual can be creator, that is a special being which has emerged out of the development of bad conscience and grown clever and calculating under the pressure of the utilitarian demands of contemporary civilization. The task facing this special individual is to bring together all the peoples that have existed so far into one harmonious whole. This unity will turn their random appearances into the meaningful enterprise of being engaged in a universal destiny. Thus, the overcoming that the to-be overman will carry out is supposed to be different from all previous overcomings, for "it will incorporate the historic achievement of the individual that was the death of peoples... The effect of this supreme act will be to overcome both the uncontrolled particularity of the thousand peoples hitherto and the ignobility of the modern state, whose march towards global dominance appeals only to the sword and the appetites and brings about only the universality of the last men. The preconditions of the superman include the whole history of the human race so far, a history now seen as the long preparation for his coming. That most powerful man who will weld mankind into a whole must possess "an unprecedented knowledge of the preconditions of culture".'[34]

Man is an experiment, Zarathustra claims, an open-ended possibility of assuming ever new and different shapes. This does not mean that he is an agglomerate of raw material upon which to perform the creative play of invention. Millennia of history have forged the shape which man has come to acquire. Although the experiments that he has undergone in the past were accidental, their inheritance is not accidental, but necessary. Once an experiment has been made, it imprints upon man some characteristic marks which can no longer be cancelled. Modern man's physiological configuration is therefore a record of the history of mankind's interactions with nature and itself. The reason, and madness, of millennia, Zarathustra maintains, now breaks out in him. However, since this

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[34] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., pp. 63-64.

experimental past was governed by chance, much ignorance and error has become body.[35] The reason and madness that have ruled over mankind hitherto are in fact 'the giant Chance', senseless and meaningless. What Zarathustra calls for, therefore, is that humanity struggle for a creator who, by means of a better knowledge of the body, will open the way both to a maximization of its unexploited potentialities and to a greater elevation of the soul.

There are, according to Zarathustra, a thousand paths which have not yet been taken. Hence, the historical responsibility of man is to pursue, for the sake of humanity, the multitude of directions still open with full awareness of where they lead to. In a world dominated so far by chance and nonsense, the overman will bring the light of knowledge and free choice. The knowledge of the body he is provided with will make of him a sort of physician who, first, heals himself, and then his fellow men. The conditions of supervitality that the physician turned overman is designed to achieve show that his investigation into man's experimental past is not merely archaeological, but looks forward to opening a new future. By enacting a physiological and spiritual recovery of man from the weaknesses of his will, the overman for the first time will intervene in the random course of history to try to divert its direction. This act of interference, inspired by love nourished with Promethean humanism, will finally give to the earth a freely chosen meaning, thus introducing into history a 'rational sense' though of a different sort both with respect to the eschatological constructions of the religious doctrines and to the spiritual or material immanent dialectics of the Hegelian and Marxian theories.

III. *Zarathustra* Parts II and III: The Doctrine of Eternal Return

Zarathustra invites modern man to cultivate the virtue of self-sacrifice for the benefit of the future generations. He seems to promise in Part I that self-denying devotion to the cause of the overman will be rewarded in an indefinite future by a remarkable development of mankind as a whole. It is this enlightened ethics of 'service to posterity' underlying Zarathustra's appeal to perish for the coming of a higher man that makes his call appear as an invocation to 'the spirited men' to take up the ideal of progress. Nevertheless, Zarathustra's teaching of progress is miles away from the modern doctrine of progress. He

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[35] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., I, 22, p. 102.

spurns the progressive schemes of the last man. He does not pursue wealth, accumulation of material goods, alleviation of suffering, relaxation of the chains imposed upon man by natural necessity. He also shows contempt for democratic politics as well as the universal moral edification of man through enlightenment. He is not even accompanied, along his path to the overman, by either of the two mainstream philosophical dogmas of progress - namely, the providential and the secularized ones.

Zarathustra rejects in fact both the idea of history as relentless progression towards the highest good presided by Providence and the Kantian conception of the historical process as exhausting but constant emancipation achieved by man through a progressive rational dominion of his lowest and most intractable instincts. The kind of progress Zarathustra envisages is instead located in a future still a long way off and will be enacted only when men are willing to undo present-day civilization and turn themselves to the passionate search for a superhuman goal. Lampert contends, however, that Zarathustra's teaching of progress is only provisional. [36] The unfolding of Zarathustra's itinerary from hermit to teacher and then again to solitary wanderer betrays, he claims, a fundamental change in his understanding of life. Whereas in Part I of Nietzsche's book Zarathustra limits himself to announcing the advent of the overman and teaches that redemption of humanity lies in a future achievement, in Part II and Part III he metamorphoses himself into the overman and reveals the thought of eternal return. By the time Part III begins, Lampert states, Zarathustra is no longer a herald, but incarnates the actualization of the overman. He does not teach any more that an overman yet to come will fulfil the meaning of the earth, but discloses reluctantly that life is an infinite recurrence of the same events and must be acknowledged as such, without attempting to escape from it by dreaming of a future kingdom of God. In the following pages, I will address this question, seeking to demonstrate that, along with the progression of his wanderings, Zarathustra does not abandon the teaching of the overman in favour of the doctrine of eternal return, but that his speeches on the eternal return of the same represent a further deepening of the notions of will to power and self-overcoming. To put it differently, I will point out that the doctrine of eternal return is taken up by Zarathustra in order to describe the act of self-overcoming in such a way that, by performing it, the will is liberated by the spirit of revenge, that is the desire to punish the past. As a matter of fact, the challenge facing

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[36] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 81.

Zarathustra is to provide modern man, dizzily floating around in search of a substitute for his waning belief in God, with some kind of teaching that might conceptualize a future of redemption without inducing him to fall into the error, committed, according to Zarathustra, by all the doctrines of salvation, of willing to impose guilt and punishment on what has been. Whether Zarathustra's endeavour is successful or not can be judged, I believe, only once his wisdom has been assessed by taking into account the close entwinement running between the concepts of will to power and overman, on the one hand, and the idea of eternal return, on the other.

Zarathustra Part I ends by showing Zarathustra leaving the market place and returning to isolation. He is escorted by his disciples who, at a crossroad, give him as a parting gift a staff with a handle featuring a serpent coiled around the sun. Part II begins with Zarathustra described as back again in his cave, withdrawn from humanity. In the solitude of his cave, he is portrayed to be waiting like a sower who has scattered his seed. The first discourse of Part II is delivered to his heart, to which he reveals to be moved by an unrestrained desire to communicate his wisdom. Then he reassembles his disciples and pleads them once more to gaze upon distant seas for the overman.

The discourse 'On the Blissful Island' is a restatement of the project of the overman, a reaffirmation of the need to create a complete and extraordinary man. God is only a supposition, Zarathustra asserts. He is a conjectural hypothesis that has been raised to the status of truth by men's wish to project their shortcomings into the perfect, the unmovable, and the intransitory. In letting out their phantasies, Zarathustra goes on, the poets, the very creators of the world, should now celebrate the human experience of time as becoming and transitoriness. Creation is a peculiarly human activity by means of which man is redeemed from suffering and lifted from life's heaviness. But, for the product of creation to come into existence, Zarathustra states again, the creator has to undergo a process of transformation which involves struggle and pain. No matter for the afflictions and tribulations that the creator goes through: when the feeling of suffering is backed up by a will to create something beyond the standards of present man, this will comes to him as a liberator and bringer of joy.[37]

In the next discourses, Zarathustra continues to define the main lineaments of the act of overcoming. Overcoming is, first of all, overcoming of pity, bad conscience, and

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[37] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., II, 2, pp. 109-112.

resentment. These feelings are to be overcome because they prevent man from cultivating a sentiment of joy about himself and developing, through self-discipline, a condition of physical and psychological health conducive to affirmation of existence. Overcoming means also to transcend the religious type of man, the death-oriented priest who drives his herd over the bridge to a future Redeemer consisting of holes into which he puts illusions.[38]

By contrast, the virtue man should be endowed with in his way to the overman is not a kind of faculty to calculate the rewards and retributions that might follow the accomplishment of some good action. Virtue is the innermost drive of the self to create, it is the internal compulsion to discharge the potential lying within the self itself. Utilitarianism, eudemonism, and hedonism are the pleasures of the rabble, of the spiritually poor. Fortunately, Zarathustra proclaims, in the future this type of the lowest man will not exist. It is precisely here, at this point, that lurks a great danger for Zarathustra: in feeling disgust with the rabble, in wishing to abolish the last man, Zarathustra proves to be affected by the poisonous passion of revenge. Should not overcoming, according to his own recommendations, be free of that sly and insidious spirit eager to punish what is aberrant in life?

Conscious of the contradiction in which he is slipping, Zarathustra assures his disciples that it is not revenge what sits within his soul. He emphasizes again that his highest hope is to deliver men from the bonds of revenge. Accordingly, he condemns the preachers of equality who, moved by a democratic feeling to correct the faults of nature, want to restore justice in the world and make all men equal. He proceeds then to demystify this will to justice, claiming that aggrieved self-conceit and repressed envy lie behind egalitarianism. In truth, the good and just men are motivated in their enterprise to emend natural injustice and social inequality by a fanatical drive for revenge against the superior individuals. In fact, once they have carried out their dreadful acts of vengefulness, they become tyrants over the same masses they had previously instigated to arise.

Indeed, men are not equal, Zarathustra declares. Recognition of the hierarchical structure of natural order and advocacy of the system of commanding and obeying that modulates mutual intercourse among the members of human species represent Zarathustra's antidote to the poisonous bite of the vindictive tarantula triumphant in modern democracy. As a consequence, the extent to which Zarathustra himself succeeds

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[38] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 4, pp. 114-117.

to transcend his nausea with the lowest man and accept the necessity of his existence will measure the value of the wisdom that teaches to strive relentlessly for something higher without harbouring in the soul the slightest desire for revenge. As much this judgement becomes a priority as it appears evident that the struggle not to succumb to the spirit of revenge while keeping firm the objective of self-overcoming will constitute the essential task to which Zarathustra will devote from now on all his efforts.

In 'The Dance Song' Zarathustra begins to cast doubts on what he calls his 'wild wisdom'. This is a form of wisdom held by the spirit of gravity which gives meaning to life but makes man grow gloomy and melancholy. During a figurative dialogue with Life, Zarathustra is mocked for considering her - Life, which appears dressed as a woman - as 'the unfathomable'. As it is the case with all the virtuous men, Life blames Zarathustra for imposing on her a set of categories that do not belong to her. These categories reflect simply his own idea of virtue. Such adjectives attached to life as 'profound', 'eternal', 'mysterious' or 'unfathomable' represent in fact conceptual instruments of interpretation designed to make all things thinkable. Since they have a lifting effect on man, the wisdom inscribed in these expressions serves the task of seducing man and rendering existence tolerable. However, while being changeable and untamed and not virtuous, life is in fact fathomable, Life reveals to Zarathustra. Then Life proceeds to suggest to Zarathustra what she really is. The knowledge that Life communicates to Zarathustra transpires as a new form of wisdom alternative to the wild wisdom Zarathustra is said to possess. It is not one of the many interpretations of life , all to be maintained equally valid. The secret wisdom Zarathustra is conveyed is spoken by Life herself so that it carries with it the inextinguishable proof of truth.

The content of the revelations made by Life to Zarathustra is unleashed in the discourse 'On Self-Overcoming', the speech in which the whole narrative of Part II comes to a climax. Here Zarathustra sets out to unmask the will to truth as a form of the will to power. He sees the will to truth as a passion to make all things thinkable. And he explains, confronted with the doubt whether things are in fact thinkable in themselves, that the will to truth wants to bend reality to its generalizations and projections in order to make things appear in accord with the conceptualizations of human mind. Also in the metaphysics of good and evil is the will to power to speak. The moral values predicated by the wisest men and the language framework which embodies their assessments reflect an obstinate will to impose permanent structures of objectification upon 'the river of becoming'.

Wherever there is a living creature, there is will to power. Even in the will of the slave, Zarathustra claims, is operating the will to be master. All living creatures are obeying creatures and, if they cannot obey themselves, they are commanded. Commanding is more difficult than obeying. In commanding one takes the risk of experimenting something unknown; one has to bear the burden of legislating without being able to ground his laws upon some external authority. As the will of the weaker persuades him to surrender to the stronger only in order to be master over those who are weaker, in the same way the stronger yields to the will to power for the sake of power, thus complying with the demands of the essence of life.

'Life is that which must overcome itself again and again': here is the secret that Zarathustra wrested from Life. There is a variety of crooked paths that life takes along its route to overcome itself and enhance its feeling of power, but the goal is always the same: to create something higher beyond itself. The task facing modern man is therefore to overcome the values of good and evil and set a new tablet of values.

Zarathustra's seizure of the essence of life, however, does not wipe out a further need for philosophy. The truth that all beings are will to power has not made them more intelligible. That Zarathustra has succeeded in creeping into the castle of Life and stealing her secret says simply that life, though changeable and elusive, cannot obstruct the attempts made by the wisest men to catch the flux of becoming that it is. Still, its secret remains enigmatic. The highest spirits who have grasped the essence of life do not find themselves contemplating peacefully an eternal truth, but are left wondering about how to make reality more worthy. At the end of the speech, Zarathustra urges for new value-givers to come, break up the old system of values by means of which life was made calculable and steer the course of history into a different direction.

But for new value-creators to appear, the sublime men - that is, figures of a penitent spirit of knowledge who, having penetrated the most profound and terrifying truths of human existence, have grown nauseated with it - are the first to be overcome. Confronted with the sublime results of their own inquiries, these men of knowledge cannot transform them into beautiful achievements. Consequently, they turn the horror of life inwardly, thus letting their souls become gloomy and their bodies ugly. Zarathustra asks for man to overcome this dark nihilism born out of sublimity throughout the refinement of the aesthetic judgement of taste. Whereas sublimity produces merely negative world views

along with body's ugliness, transcendence of sublimity into beauty elevates the fundamental will to power to the heights of gracefulness.

The horrific truth discovered by the sublime men is formulated by a soothsayer as follows: 'everything is empty, everything is one, everything is past'.[39] Zarathustra believes that this prophecy, hanging over the earth, contains the potential to sink humanity into despair, overwhelmed by a sense of weariness with life. He himself is actually overwhelmed by it. For three days he goes about grieving, incapable of taking any food or drink until he falls into a deep sleep. As he awakes up, he tells his disciples a nightmare he had while sleeping. He dreamed of being a grave-watchman in the castle of death. He was there as a guardian of death's coffins in which all the eternities of the past were sealed. But a terrible event occurred and made him awake in a state of doze. He heard three strokes on the door. He went to the door and tried to open it. But he couldn't. The keys didn't work. Suddenly, a raging wind tore the door open. In its whistling fury, it threw a black coffin at him. Thousands of masks of angels, owls, fools, and butterflies spilled out laughing at him. Terrified, Zarathustra shrieked and woke up.

Lampert reads this nightmare as the key-event that opens Zarathustra's eyes to the insufficiency of the promise of the overman and makes him understand that redemption from the past cannot lie in the future. According to Lampert, what lies in the glass-coffins filled with the dusty eternities that Zarathustra holds in custody is the whole of the past, while Zarathustra's seclusion in the castle of death symbolizes the waiting of the herald for redemption to be delivered in the future by the overman. However, what the future brings is a mocking laughter which dashes Zarathustra's hopes for redemption and shows 'the bondage of every future to its past.' [40]

Lampert's interpretation of this section on the soothsayer seems to be overdone. Although the dream shows Zarathustra still unable to overcome himself, his eventual cry is not emitted out of dismay at the realization that his hope for the overman is extinguished. Rather, Zarathustra's bewilderment derives, as Whitlock points out, from the recognition that a great distance still separates him from the overman. In order to fill the gap, he has to submit himself to a new test: the test of the eternal return. This will make the difference between the overman and the last man and only the result of the test will prove whether or

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[39] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 19, p. 155.

[40] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., p. 138.

not the goal of the overman is set to fail.

Zarathustra prepares the ground for the revelation of the thought of eternal return in an astonishingly profound and narratively brilliant discourse entitled 'Of Redemption'. The speech is concerned mainly with the question of giving a content to and defining in more detailed terms the sense of redemption:

> To redeem the past and to transform every "It was" into an "I wanted it thus!" - that alone do I call redemption![41]

What man must be redeemed from is the past, the entire dimension of the bygone events that so far have been unfolding accidentally as something over which he had no control. Man has to reflect on his past not just in order to know and accept it fatalistically, but to enact a movement of overcoming which will lead him eventually to will all that from which he has been formed. Willing retains a liberating power. Its redeeming force is so unrestrained that it might drive man to break up even what appears unalterable and in front of which he feels frustrated and impotent. But the will is still a prisoner, Zarathustra states:

> Willing liberates: but what in that fastens to fetters even the liberator? "It was": that is what the will's teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is angry spectator of all things past. The will cannot will backwards: that it cannot break time and time's desire - that is the will's most lonely affliction.[42]

It is time, that is the passage of time, that imprisons the will. While the creative activity of the will is projected into future possibilities, the becoming of time inexorably forces time backwards into past necessity. The horizon of possibilities opened up to the manipulative operations of the creative will is therefore not unlimited. Past achievements shape the present and circumscribe the range of possible scenarios into which the future might be moulded. What we can expect out of the future is already determined to a certain extent by what is and has been. There is no chance for a new beginning totally extrapolated from the past and the present to come into existence. Thwarted in its creative potentialities, the will plunges into dismay. It feels to be encompassed within a spiral of immutability:

> Willing liberates: what does willing itself device to free itself from its affliction and to mock at its dungeon? Alas, every prisoner becomes a fool! The imprisoned will, too, releases itself

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[41] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., II, 20, p. 161.

[42] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 20, p. 161.

> in a foolish way. It sullenly wrathful that time does not run back; "That which was" - that is what the stone which it cannot roll away is called. And so, out of wrath and ill-temper, the will rolls stones about and takes revenge upon him who does not, like it, feel wrath and ill-temper. Thus the will, the liberator, becomes a malefactor: and upon all that can suffer it takes revenge for its inability to go backwards.[43]

The will cannot will backwards, nor it can break time's inexorable flowing. Thus, by understanding that the past is not redeemable, the will draws the conclusion that life is no good. So, madness begins to take possession of it. Out of the realization that the past cannot be recaptured to be worked out again, the will begins to take revenge on it and punish life:

> This, yes, this alone is *revenge* itself: the will's antipathy towards time and time's "It was". Truly, a great foolishness dwells in our will; and that this foolishness acquired spirit has become a curse to all human kind. *The spirit of revenge*: my friends, that up to now has been mankind chief concern; and where there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment. 'Punishment' is what revenge calls itself: it feigns a good conscience for itself with a lie. And because there is suffering in the willer himself, since he cannot will backwards - therefore willing itself and all life was supposed to be - punishment! [44]

As the will to power, raged by desire for revenge, sublimates itself into the creative art of producing metaphorical and conceptual language, it begins to enact a self-deceitful play of reconciliation with time. Thus philosophy, the most spiritualised form of life, puts itself in the service of revenge. It sets out to devise moral views of the world which, though designed to deliver redemption from the unreachable and unalterable past, turn out to cast the will into a new, tragic vortex of self-annihilation.

Each of these views is a 'preaching of madness'. They teach that things in the world are morally ordered according to general laws of justice and punishment; or they teach that, since the past cannot be rolled away and punishment, as a consequence, proves to be eternal, the only escape from the endless cycle of reincarnations and punishments is individual annihilation; or, finally, they teach the Schopenhauerean doctrine according to which, since the past cannot be undone through punishment, the will can be redeemed only by not willing. All these teachings share the curse, Zarathustra assumes, of designating a universal moral order in which to enslave the will and through which to devalue the earth.

It is at this point that Zarathustra, in order to offer an alternative teaching suitable to liberate the will from the vicious circle of revenge and punishment and redeem the self

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[43] Cf F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 20, pp. 161-62.

[44] Cf F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 20, p. 162.

from the facticity of the past, Zarathustra hints, though vaguely and in an allusive way, at the doctrine of eternal return:

> All 'It was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance - until the creative will says to it: 'But I willed it thus! Thus shall I will it!'[45]

To attain deliverance from the spirit of revenge the will must will the past as it was. But to will the past as it was means that the creative will to power must will the eternal return of the past. Zarathustra's formulation of the problem of redemption shows, on Lampert's reading, that redemption cannot be secured by annihilating the will or breaking up the passage of time, for both the will and time's becoming cannot be suspended by man. Redemption requires that the will come to recognize that, since the accidental chance which has forged the world has impressed upon it the seal of necessity, things are to a large extent unalterable. Redemption from revenge comes when the creative will learns to will the world not to be other than what its accidental history has made it. It comes when the creative will learns to let beings be as they are to such an extent that it wills their eternal return.

The connection between will to power and eternal return, Lampert concludes, is the connection between fact and value. The will to power, disguised as will to knowledge, comes to discover the fundamental fact about the world, namely that the world has been made by chance and accident and cannot be changed. Hence, put on its more appropriate flying garments of creative and artistic will, the will sets out to posit a new ark of values *in accordance with* the fundamental fact just discovered. As a consequence, the teaching of eternal return makes it possible, both on the practical and evaluative level, a form of human life in consonance with what life *de facto* is as a whole.[46]

Lampert's reading of Zarathustra's enigma of redemption, highly reminiscent of the Kantian dichotomy between phenomenon and noumenon, ends up constructing an image of Zarathustra as an apologist of a resigned, though apparently joyful, fatalism. But, despite the fact that Zarathustra lets himself be caught by a flash of doubt as he wonders about his own identity whether he is a creator, or a promiser, or a fulfiller, the ideal of the overman has not been relinquished. He still laments for the fragmentation of modern man

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[45] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 20, p. 163.

[46] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., pp. 148-49.

as a result of having over-developed and hyper specialized one or a few faculties. He claims that man has grown deformed and incomplete:

> The terrible thing to my eye is to find men shattered in pieces and scattered as if over a battle-field of slaughter. And when my eye flies from the present to the past, it always discovers the same thing: fragments and limbs and dreadful chances - but no men! The present and the past upon the earth - alas! my friends, that is my most intolerable burden; and I should not know how to live, if I were not a seer of that which must come.[47]

Zarathustra still envisages in Part II the enactment of a complete and harmonious individual in whom all faculties are developed to the greatest extent. The actualization of such an individual can be found only in the future and will fulfil Zarathustra's aspiration to achieve the goal of redeeming history from its imperfection and accidental making:

> I walk among men as among fragments of the future: of that future which I scan. And it is all my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance.[48]

The theme of eternal return is taken up allegorically again later in the section 'Of the Vision and the Riddle', a fundamental stage in Zarathustra's itinerary towards the overman since there is unveiled, to an audience of sailors, the abysmal thought of eternal recurrence of the same. On board of a ship, Zarathustra tells of having undergone an enigmatic and surrealistic experience. He presents to the sailors a riddle that occurred to him in a vision. The riddle speaks of Zarathustra climbing a mountain path. He forces himself upward despite the spirit of gravity, his archenemy, pulls him downward. Zarathustra is called by the spirit of gravity 'the stone of wisdom'. But, like every stone, the spirit of gravity warns, the stone upon which Zarathustra soars himself high must fall too. The text indicates that in the figure of the spirit of gravity is objectified that modern inclination to nihilism which threatens to thwart Zarathustra's spiritual progress and cause his downfall across the bridge to the overman. But Zarathustra, though oppressed and tormented by the tortures imposed upon him by the spirit of gravity, keeps on climbing. Suddenly, he summons his courage - a fundamental quality, according to Zarathustra, that has allowed man to raise above all animals - and challenges the spirit of gravity. The challenge Zarathustra launches to the spirit of gravity consists in a 'battle of wits' in which he discloses his abysmal thought in

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[47] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cit., II, 20, p. 160.

[48] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., II, 20, p. 161.

the persuasion that the spirit of gravity, unable to endure it, will be crushed.

The spirit of gravity, by now transfigured into a dwarf, takes up the challenge. He jumps away from Zarathustra's shoulder, squats down upon a stone posed in front of him, and sets off to listen to Zarathustra's riddle. A gateway stands before them. The scene is now set for Zarathustra to reveal his abysmal thought of eternal return:

> Behold this gateway, dwarf! It has two aspects. Two paths come together: no one has ever reached their end. This long lane behind us: it goes for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us: that is another eternity. They are in opposition to one another, these paths: they abut on one another: and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it: 'Moment'. But if one were to follow them further and ever further and further: do you think, dwarf, that these paths would be in eternal opposition?' - 'Everything straight lies', murmured the dwarf disdainfully. 'All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.[49]

The dwarf's answer seems to admit the circularity of time, but only apparently, as if he were performing a bit of dialectical or sophistic game. In fact, as Zarathustra goes on, he cannot stand his more articulate version of the thought:

> Behold this moment! From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs *back*: an eternity lies behind us. Must not all things that *can* run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past? And if all things have been here before: what do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must not this gateway, too, have been here before? And are not all things bound fast together in such a way that this moment draws after it all future things? *Therefore* - draws itself too? For all things that *can* run *must* also run once again forward along this long lane.[50]

Having unveiled the riddle of the eternal return, Zarathustra is caught by a feeling of fright. In the moonlight, he hears a dog howling. And then he has another vision. He sees a young shepherd writhing and choking, while a black snake is hanging out of his mouth. With disgust the shepherd bites the snake's head off and spits it out. Thus, the shepherd is transformed:

> No longer a shepherd, no longer a man - a transformed being surrounded with light, laughing! Never yet on earth has any man laughed as he laughed.[51]

Lampert understands the spirit of gravity as a Socratic spirit of rational optimism who has

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[49] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 2, p. 178.
[50] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 2, pp. 178-79.
[51] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 2, p. 180.

mastered the world in several forms of Platonism.[52] The latest form that Platonism has taken on, however, is Schopenhauerean pessimism. This no longer believes in a redeeming, eschatological outcome of mortal life. That life is no good and has to be annihilated, this is the latest decadent version of Platonic metaphysics. In order to defeat the spirit of gravity and gain the mastery of the world, Zarathustra has to come to terms with this mystic-sceptical world view, Lampert claims. As they are portrayed in the opening scene of the section while climbing a mountain path, Zarathustra and the spirit of gravity look as irreconcilable enemies. In the fight they undertake, the survival of the one will lead to the destruction of the other. Hence, if Zarathustra prevails, the whole Socratic, rational tradition culminated in Schopenhauer's negation of life is doomed to be slain.

At Zarathustra's spelling out of the doctrine of eternal return, Lampert continues, the spirit of gravity is devastated. He cannot bear it because Zarathustra radicalizes the thought of eternal return to the extent of claiming that it is not just similar things that come and go in an endless cycle of recurrence, but it is exactly the same things that return, and precisely as they were and are. The spirit of gravity yields to this version of eternal return because he realizes that this moment will eternally return and, hence, cannot be annihilated.

Also, Lampert reads the spirit of gravity turned into a dwarf as an allegorical figure of the small man, the man of the modern age shattered into pieces and fragments. He maintains that the vision of the shepherd and the act of biting off the snake's head mark a great transformation in Zarathustra's teaching. Zarathustra comes to realize, by working out the meaning of his vision, that man's redemption does not lie in some novel future whose actualization in the figure of the overman will redeem the whole historical past as an imperfect stage developing into a distant perfect fulfilment. He sees instead that the outcome of the history of Socratic rationalism is the enactment of a will which, in willing the eternal return of the same, wills the repetition of all things, hence also of the contemptible small man.

It is at this climatic point that Lampert's reading is flawed. He understands the laughing shepherd raising up after biting the head's snake off as the symbolic moment in which Zarathustra becomes the overman. What occurs in this visionary scene, he contends, is the transformation of Zarathustra through redemption. Having replaced the ideal of the overman with the less vertiginous idea of the eternal return, Zarathustra has now to

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[52] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, cit., pp. 160-180.

swallow, in order to be redeemed, the nauseating consequence of the eternal existence of the small man. And that is the epilogue of Zarathustra's itinerary.

This reading defies the evidence that, in the last passage quoted above, the shepherd, that is Zarathustra, is a "transformed being", no longer a shepherd, no longer a man. Or, better, Lampert claims that Zarathustra has metamorphosed into the overman, but refuses to assign to him the characteristics of a true overman, something beyond the actual man. Zarathustra, as depicted by him, is merely the teacher of eternal return in a peaceful universe without struggle and tension.

Whatever side one may take on the issue, it must be pointed out that Zarathustra's transformation has so far occurred only imaginarily in his vision. Lampert holds that the image is actualized in the section entitled 'The Convalescent' where the deeds of the vision are performed. I will argue that the narrative of this section shows that Zarathustra does not identify himself with the overman, who remains at a long distance from him.

The section unfolds as follows: Back into the solitude of his cave, one morning Zarathustra springs up from his bed like a madman and cries out in a terrible voice. Drawn by the shriek, his animals come to the cave and find him trying to articulate his most abysmal thought. But, having failed to give expression to his abyss, he falls down into death-like trance from which he emerges pale and trembling. His convalescence lasts seven days during which he is looked after by his animals, the eagle and the snake. Eventually, on the seventh day, the animals bid him to step out of the cave and go to the garden-like world. They ask Zarathustra whether a new, oppressive knowledge has come to him, but Zarathustra, rather than answering the question, tells them to go on talking and let him listen, since their words are refreshing and allow man 'to dance over all things'. The animals, then, take the opportunity offered to them by Zarathustra to launch themselves into a grateful hymn to time and becoming:

> Everything goes, everything returns; the will of existence rolls for ever. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs for ever... Existence begins in every instant; the ball there rolls around every there. The middle is everywhere. The path of eternity is crooked.[53]

The animals' formulation of the theory of eternal return is clearly cosmological. They speak, in a metaphorical language, of a non-teleological universe where things come and

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[53] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 13, p. 234.

go endlessly without any purpose. Time is circular: past, present, and future are not definite moments in the linear trajectory of time, but each instant is simultaneously beginning, middle, and end in the circle of time. Zarathustra confirms that the animals have spoken out his own thought, thus committing himself , at least apparently, to the content of what they said. Then he proceeds to express his great disgust with the small man, as the snake bitten by the shepherd symbolizes. However, he learns throughout the test of eternal return that the multitudinous man of the market place cannot be eradicated. This recognition of the necessity of an order of rank among men enables him to pass the test of the overman and teach a doctrine of self-overcoming exempted from the spirit of resentment. Yet, finally redeemed, Zarathustra cannot restrain himself from lamenting that the greatest men are still all too similar to the small man. He does not want to turn himself into an accuser of man, but he cannot help calling forth a new world that should be enacted according to his learning that 'the wickedest in man is necessary for the best in him and that all that is most wicked in him is his best strength and his hardest stone for the creator.'[54] Here is an explicit allusion to the overman whose spiritual ascent has to pass through a process of naturalization of man, that is throughout the rediscovery of the most immediate and instinctual aspects of life.

The animals interrupt Zarathustra's speech and bid him once more to go out to the garden-like world and learn from the song-birds to sing. Then they proclaim Zarathustra teacher of the eternal return and give a further version of the doctrine:

> For your animals well know, O Zarathustra, who you are and should become: behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence*, that is now *your* destiny... Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally and we ourselves with them, and that we have already existed an infinite number of times before and all things with us. You teach that there is a great year of becoming, a colossus of a year: this year must, like an hour-glass, turn itself over again and again, so that it may run down and run out anew: so that all these years resemble one another, in the greatest things and in the smallest, so that we ourselves resemble ourselves in each great year, in the greatest things and in the smallest.[55]

The crucial point in the new formulation of eternal return is that it is not only what is smallest that recurs eternally, but also what is greatest. Then the animals enact a scene in which they represent what Zarathustra would say were he at the point of death:

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[54] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 13, p. 235.
[55] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 13, p. 237.

> And if you should die now, O Zarathustra..., you would say...'Now I die and decay, and in an instant I shall be nothingness. Souls are as mortal as bodies. But the complex of causes in which I am entangled will recur - it will create me again! I myself am part of those causes of the eternal recurrence. I shall return with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent - *not* to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, to teach once more the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak once more the teaching of the great noontide of earth and man, to tell man of the Superman once more. I spoke my teaching, I broke upon my teaching: thus my eternal fate will have it - as a prophet do I perish! Now the hour has come when he who is going down shall bless himself. Thus - ends Zarathustra's down-going'.[56]

Death is the individual annihilation, both bodily and spiritual. There is no after-world, no permanent eternal life after this life on the earth. There is no escape from the wheels of existence, either in the form of resurrection in a heavenly universe or in the form of a denial of the attributes that constitute the essence of the individual - will, for instance. There is only one world, this one in which we live, and the eternal recurrence, within it, of life and death. This is Zarathustra's teaching, and with the announcement of eternal return his destiny is fulfilled.

Yet, Zarathustra does not hear the last formulation of the doctrine and lies still conversing with his soul. His absence betrays a certain distance from the words just spoken by the animals. The cosmological and metaphysical interpretation of the notion of eternal return is the business of the animals and Zarathustra, rather ostentatiously, does not want to be involved with it. Their proofs are not his own, and are at odds with his suspicions of scientific truth. Therefore, his down-going is not yet over and his destiny as the teacher of eternal return is truly accomplished only in Part IV where he addresses the highest men on the earth on the notion he has been seeking to spell out for so long.

The sense of eternal return, however, is fully disclosed in the last songs of Part III where Zarathustra invokes eternal return by naming it *Eternity*.[57] There, eternal recurrence emerges as a strategy of the will to power to will the present moment in a certain way rather than as an ontological category.[58] It expresses the will to power and articulates a particular attitude of the will towards temporality. In saying to the present moment 'Go but return', the will to recurrence lets this moment pass away without holding on to it. Yet, it does not simply let this moment disappear. On the contrary, the will to recurrence asks to

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[56] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 13, pp. 237-38.

[57] Cf. F. Nietzsche, ibid., III, 15, pp. 244-47.

[58] Cf. R. Small, "Eternal Recurrence", in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 13: 4, (December 1983), pp. 585-605.

the present moment to come again and again, for an infinite number of times. So understood, recurrence affirms the moment both as changing and as necessary, and combines the idea of being with that of becoming. On the one hand, recurrence implies that everything comes and goes in an uninterrupted process of change. On the other hand, the moment does not consume itself in just one occurrence, but is bound to return exactly in the same way as it is now. What emerges from this account on eternal recurrence is that Zarathustra's opposition to Platonism, considered as a conception of reality which recognizes true being only to the unchanging and eternal and dismisses the passage of time as mere appearance, is not absolute. When eternal return is conceived of in voluntaristic terms, to will eternal recurrence means to will both the becoming of being and the being of becoming. [59]

There is a further implication involved in the idea of eternal return. If one wills eternal recurrence, one has to will the present moment infinitely many times. But, in order to will the repetition of this moment, one has to will the repetition of all moments that have led to this moment. Hence, to will eternal recurrence means to will backwards as well as forwards. In other terms, when one affirms the past to the extent of claiming 'Yes, I willed it', one wills all that which has led to the present moment without exposing oneself to the futility of taking revenge on it. Moreover, since the past events are related in such a way that they generate the present moment, any creative act of evaluation is an act performed *sub specie aeternitatis*. To will eternal recurrence of the present moment is to experience the unity of all things and to be so well disposed towards life as a whole that we desire its eternal recurrence.

On this account, eternal recurrence represents a thought-experiment more than an ontological hypothesis about the world. Applied to the normative sphere, it encourages the individuals to act in such a way that they must will the eternal repetition of their actions. It is a voluntaristic criterion of the will to power functioning as a selective test to separate those who are strong from those who are weak. The strong are driven by it to affirm themselves even more while the weak are frustrated to the point that they want to negate themselves even more. If existence has no meaning or goal whatsoever but is bound to

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[59] Cf. G. Whitlock, *Returning to Sils-Maria*, cit., pp. 23-26.

return as it is for an infinite number of times, who else than the strong would like to start their lives all over again under the same actual circumstances? [60]

IV. The Ideal of the Overman and the Teaching of Eternal Return: An Argument in Favour of Their Reconciliation

The thought of eternal return is, as M. Haar emphasizes, a sort of religion that releases life from its heaviness. Although opposed to those religions which promise a better life in an after-world provided that the individuals go through this world enlightened by a certain tablet of values, the religion of Zarathustra offers happiness [61] on earth , that is empowerment of life to those who are strong enough to seize the fleeting moments of life in their absolute contingency. It does not demand, on the part of the individual, any duty or moral obligation, it does not condemn anything as sinful or wrong, it considers everything, simply because it is, innocent.

The discrepancy between the animals' formulation of the idea of eternal return and Zarathustra's version is acknowledged also by Lampert. But he holds that it is not a question that the animals are mistaken and Zarathustra is right. The difference between the two positions is merely a reflection of the different vantage points from which the animals' speeches and Zarathustra's hymn to eternity are made. According to Lampert, the animals' speeches represent the point of view of things redeemed, Zarathustra's aloofness represents the point of view of the redeemer. [62] The animals express gratitude to Zarathustra for letting them be what they are. Their celebration of eternal return is a song of beatitude for the harmony of the universe where each being is given the freedom to come and go in the stream of becoming without being threatened by any external authority. The animals understand the eternal return as a joyful conceptualization of the natural cycles of birth and death, and desire to be again exactly as they are now because they love life. However, Lampert recognizes that Zarathustra's image of the garden-like world sung by the animals is not so idyllic. He is well aware of the tragic side of existence underneath the reality of

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[60] Cf. M. Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language", in D. B. Allison (ed.), *The New Nietzsche*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985, pp. 5-37.

[61] On the consistency of applying to Nietzsche's main themes such concepts as "happiness" or "beatitude" see H. Birault, "Beatitude in Nietzsche", in D. B. Allison, ibid., pp. 209-231.

[62] Cf. L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching,* cit., p. 213.

the garden. His idea of eternal return is the culmination of a long ascent designed to retranslate man into nature. But his goal is not reconciliation. Having defeated the Socratic optimist rationalism and modern nihilism in the form of the soothsayer's teaching, Zarathustra's aim is to transfigure himself into Dionysus, the god of tragedy. In spite of staging Silenus' truth that life is not worth living, tragedy does not endorse pessimism and nihilism. Tragedy is the artistic affirmation of existence which sublimates the abysmal truth about the world into a creative act of evaluation. Zarathustra embraces Dionysus, the God of tragedy, in order to desacralize the earth from the hypostatization of any cosmological or rational necessity and to bestow upon it new weights and measures. What will dawn as a consequence of the teaching of eternal return, Lampert concludes echoing Zarathustra's 'Yes and Amen Song', is a new ordering of all things where a) passions are elevated into something higher and more spiritual; b) scientific inquiry is not abused for a technological mastery of nature but secures nature its eternal return as it is; c) and the spirit of gravity which makes things heavy and grave is replaced by a dancing spirit that makes them light and easy. [63]

Lampert's reasoning is wide-ranging and it is enlightening to follow his argumentative path. He claims that Nietzsche considers Stoicism as the paradigm of philosophy. He attributes to Nietzsche the belief that the attempt of Stoicism to master human nature represents the emblem of a more general tendency of philosophy to tyrannize nature as a whole. Because the Stoic philosopher is able to master the piece of nature that he himself is, it seems to follow, Nietzsche argues according to Lampert's reconstruction, that nature as a whole lets itself be tyrannized. From this insight, Nietzsche concludes that there is no philosophy which is not influenced by the drive to rule and dominate. He unmasks the will to truth as the highest and most spiritual form of the will to power. The text of nature filled by modern physicists with mathematical formulas and laws of nature is only interpretation. The idea of a conformity of nature to law, as though there were a commanding law-giver to whom nature gives obedience, is an anthropomorphic description of natural events which betrays a more fundamental inclination to control the spontaneous course of nature. Nietzsche denies however, Lampert emphasizes, that nature defies the interference of the most spiritualised will to power. In his reading, Nietzsche calls for a new act of interpretation which will give to 'the highest beings' a new responsibility for

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[63] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., pp. 242-243.

ending the attempt to make nature malleable at their commands and establishing 'an order that is true to the earth.'[64]

Finally, Lampert asserts that, in spite of the will to power being the name for the ontological essence of all beings, this requires the affirmation of eternal return in order to make sure that beings are let be what they are. The new evaluation of beings aims to defeat Platonism in the form of both Christianity and modernity . It confers measure on things without drawing upon a transcendent or rational or future order, but by rejoicing at the way things are. Opposition to any teaching on the linearity of time underlines Nietzsche's idea of eternal return. Both the Christian belief in a future eschatological fulfilment of time and the modern teaching of progress represent Nietzsche's targets of attack. Therefore, Zarathustra's abandonment of his own early promise of a future redeeming achievement of the overman is implied by his new teaching of eternal return which poses the highest good in earthly life as it is. Lampert refuses to consider Zarathustra as the latest extension of modernity. His teaching does not exhibit parallels, he argues, with Bacon's and Descartes' fables of human mastery of nature or with godlike dreams of a society where men are provided with an infinity of devices that enable them to enjoy life. Rather, Zarathustra calls for a new beginning that makes possible the recovery from the modern findings of progress which, in a secularized form, carries forward Christianity's slave revolt in morality. Progress, to be more comprehensive, descends directly from the Socratic rational optimism which inaugurated the endeavour in philosophy to know and subdue being through the principle of causality combined with logical reasoning. It is this kind of decayed Platonism, which at the end of a long historical process has assumed the theoretical and practical form of the last man, that must be opposed by pointing to an alternative ideal. It is in this respect, Lambert contends, that Zarathustra is adamant to make sure that the ideal of the overman he longs for is preserved from the 'curse' of utopianism. The future he promises will not deliver redemption out of the spirit of revenge nor time will stop running by collapsing into a state of permanent present. Zarathustra puts forward a teaching that acknowledges the perennial flux of time, does not purport to remove suffering from life, and invites to love life as it is to the extent of willing its eternal return.

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[64] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 254.

In sum, Lambert rejects Heidegger's accusation that Nietzsche's idea of eternal return conceals the modern desire for a vengeful conquest of nature. Nietzsche's philosophy represents, he argues, an untiring effort to bring man back to nature, the exhortation not to be intended as a restatement of Rousseau's state of nature, since there has never been for Nietzsche a natural humanity as envisaged by Rousseau. Nietzsche sees instead modern man as the latest outcome of the philosophical will to the mastery of nature by technological means. This kind of hubris towards nature unfolds in the form of a democratic and humanistic instinct to emend it in order to eliminate the order of rank established by natural and social inequality. The result of technological and democratic hubris as applied to nature is global homogeneity and machined uniformity.

Against the sheer hubris of modern science springing out of the passion of fear and sentiment of revenge, in Lampert's interpretation Nietzsche looks for a science grounded in the passion of adventure. [65] He aims at releasing science from the will to alter by confining it within the limits of a mere contemplation of the secrets of nature. A philosophy ruled by the imperative of eternal return should in his view dictate to science its scope of application. The redundant circularity of eternal return is in fact radically at odds with the progressive trajectory of linear time underlying modern scientific belief in the perfectibility of corrupted bodies. To impose the imperative of eternal return on science means, therefore, to eradicate at once the modern technological project to achieve a state of permanence of time by making global society predictable and individual bodies immortal via technological manipulation. In ultimate analysis, if there is a point where Lampert's account can be pinned down to, this is the claim that eternal return emerges as a teaching concerned with the temporality of beings and with affirming mortality as the essence of life in a world still surrounded by a halo of mystery.

To think of beings as creatures who return infinitely in time opens the way to the transcendence of technology into justice. Science, under the sway of the imperative of eternal return, far from serving the purposes of modern civilization to enhance human power over nature, could offer a sober vision of the universe where a measure is assigned to the possibility to alter what is given by nature. In such a universe, human beings would regard themselves as beings among others who love each other and will that they will always be in the same way as they are now. A joyful 'Yes' to everything that was and is

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[65] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 275.

must underpin justice, that is the standpoint of a flowing eternity which commands to let beings be as they are and to affirm the eternal return of temporal life as the highest ideal. [66]

In conclusion, Lampert asserts, Nietzsche recognizes that Platonism and Christianity have shaped modern thought and marked indelibly the history of European humanity. Yet, he believes that the nihilistic fate towards which modern man is directed is not ineluctable, since European civilization, which has become by now a global fate, has created a tension of the spirit leading either to the reality of the last man or to the goal expressed by Zarathustra himself in whom nature as a whole and human nature in particular are eventually made complementary. [67]

Lampert's interpretation of the doctrine of eternal return is highly conditioned by his determination to dissociate Nietzsche's philosophy from what he considers Heidegger's misunderstanding. Heidegger reads Zarathustra as a seeker of mastery for whom the world is a standing reserve at his disposal. He regards the thought of eternal return as the most refined and spiritualised attempt to impose being on becoming. In willing to eternalize the passage of time, eternal return 'expresses the modern technological desire for perpetual mastery.' [68] As a consequence, Heidegger counts Nietzsche among the metaphysical thinkers of modernity who pursued the modern task of discovering a permanent grounding for the impermanent flowing of time.

In order to support his claim, Heidegger argues that Zarathustra is both the herald of the overman and the teacher of eternal return. The two teachings belong together. A new type of man is needed, he explains, because humanity has reached the historical moment when it has to assume dominion over the whole earth. But, since man as he is up to now is not prepared to fulfil this task, another individual surpassing the actual man must come to replace him. However, as long as man is called upon to cross the bridge to the overman, he must be delivered from the spirit of revenge. Nietzsche discloses the essence of revenge, Heidegger maintains, as the will's aversion to the transience of time. Given that the passage of time makes the will suffer, Nietzsche perceives that the will takes revenge on time by positing absolute Ideals compared to which the temporal, that is the earthly, is devalued to the status of non-being. Therefore, according to Heidegger's reading,

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[66] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 281.
[67] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 283.
[68] Cf. L. Lampert, ibid., p. 262.

Nietzsche concludes that man, in order to take control over nature, needs to be released from the spirit of revenge. This means, in other words, that redemption cannot come out of negation of the will, but by affirming time and its transience in the eternal return of the same. [69]

There is no doubt, I believe, that the overman is the central figure of Zarathustra's teaching, and Heidegger is unconfutable when he says that the doctrine of the overman is strictly entwined with the doctrine of eternal return. To remove from Zarathustra the aspiration for the overman, as Lampert seems to be doing when he reads Zarathustra redeemed from revenge as the actualization of the overman, makes of him a sort of unhappy consciousness incompatible with his spiritual tension. The overman is the philosopher of the future who is concerned about the future of man. He is the goal which humanity should long for, though his philosophy unfolds more as a philosophy of the future than as a philosophy of progress. [70] The project of the overman does not meet completely the canons of the modern conception of progress, since it is not the culmination of the 'humanism of progress' which brings to all human beings release from social inequality and natural constraint. The future that Zarathustra envisages does not exhibit democratic and universalist concerns. The overman, in his imagination, will live side by side with the last man and will compensate for the lack of energy of his rival type. The power he will try to affirm is not political but artistic. He lives detached from the world, sober and austere, full of disdain for everything may level down human beings.

The overman is the possibility in the future of something more than human that fulfils the essence of life as will to power. The overman actualizes to the highest degree the artistic capacity of man to overcome himself by converting the chaos he and the world are into anthropomorphic form. His work of revaluation will aim to retrieve 'cultural health' by enacting normative models derived from methodic experiments. [71]

But if the overman is the ideal of an augmentation of man as he is now, how can he be reconciled with the teaching of eternal return? Magnus seems to hold a solution to this dilemma. He claims that in the reign of the overman 'eternal recurrence functions as

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[69] Cf. M. Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra", in D. B. Allison (ed.), *The New Nietzsche*, cit., pp. 64-79.

[70] Cf. M. Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language", in D. B. Allison , *The New Nietzsche*, ibid., p. 24.

[71] Cf. M. E. Windham, "Nietzsche's Philosopher of the Future as an Ethicist: Experimentalism in Ethics", in *International Studies in Philosophy*, XXIV/2, 1992, pp. 115-124.

a postulate eternalizing life.' [72] According to him, eternal recurrence is a sort of romantic imperative that recommends to live as if our lives recurred eternally. Although it does not posit fixed goals external to the eternal circularity of all things, it does not leave man crippled in a state of unconditioned relativism. It drives man to intensify his life by imposing the quality of eternity upon the moment. But, again, how can man choose what to be and how to live his life if he has already lived infinite lives all of them in the same way?

Magnus argues that eternal return, conceived of as an ethical imperative, poses an existential paradox: because we have no memory of our previous lives, we know what we were only once we have actually chosen what to become. This absence of memory, however, rather than plunging the will into a fatalistic paralysis, 'intensifies the dynamics of choice, because whatever I choose to be that I shall be for infinite recurrences... Thus through the interpenetration of an infinite future and infinite past within the finite moment, the present too is eternalized. Paradoxically, I am free to create my determinate fate.'[73]

Magnus claims also that to be committed to a normative rather than cosmological interpretation of eternal recurrence does not allow one to consider the overman as a sort of ideal-type of human perfectibility, but imposes one to see him as a mere representation of a particular attitude towards life. He holds that, if the overman is regarded to be the type of man who celebrates strength and health against decadence and stagnation, then the set of characteristics he is attributed make him precisely the sort of heroic ideal which the thought of eternal return was meant to do away with. Eternal return is instead a kind of Kantian imperative, purely formal without any content. It does not articulate any specific form of life. [74]

The conclusion Magnus draws about the overman from the normative principle of eternal recurrence echoes that held by Lampert and, in effect, seems to have inspired Lampert's extensive study on *Zarathustra*. Both seem to deny the urge of the overman to overcome man as he is now. This inference, however, is not necessary if the image of the overman is seen as a contingent rather than absolute ideal. This view could reconcile the

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[72] Cf. B. Magnus, "Nietzsche's Eternalistic Counter-Myth", in *Review of Metaphysics* 26:4, (1973), pp. 604-16.

[73] Cf. B. Magnus, ibid., p. 612.

[74] Cf. B. Magnus, "Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's *Uebermensch*", in *Review of Metaphysics*, 36, (March 1983), pp. 633-659.

ideal of the overman and the teaching of eternal return, and at the same time maintain that the overman is an ideal type of man to be achieved in the future. Robert Pippin offers an argument which seems to meet all these theoretical demands.

Pippin agrees with Lampert in recognizing a dramatic break occurring halfway through Zarathustra's itinerary determined by Zarathustra's realization that the doctrine of eternal return is poised to shatter his hopes for a new kind of human being to come into existence and redeem present-day declining humanity. He claims that the image of eternal return is received by Zarathustra as a shock. Its significance undermines the possibility that a conscious process of self-transformation may lead to the establishment of a permanent state beyond the condition of the last man. The revelation of eternal recurrence, Pippin goes on, exposes the overman as a radically temporal, contingent ideal whose range of validity cannot transcend 'what we might want to be, given what we see we have become.' [75]

Insofar as eternal return, even in its non-cosmological version, asserts that all things return, the last man cannot be historically overcome. At the same time, however, if the last man is bound to return eternally, his eternal appearance will reproduce the conditions of decadence that actually make possible the overman. The last man and the overman, thus, turn out to form an indissoluble link which rules out the possibility of an ultimate historical redemption. Nevertheless, Zarathustra's realization of the self-deceiving mystification lying beneath every sort of eschatological goal does not lead him to abandon the ideal of the overman. Rather, Pippin holds, he sets out in Part III and IV to reconstruct that ideal. Zarathustra comes to understand that, like all the utopian ideals inhabiting the history of philosophy, also his own hope for a higher type of man is motivated by a sentiment of revenge aiming at transforming the future into a permanent present. Hence, in order to avoid to the overman the same fate, he has to overcome in himself the spirit of resentment. This means, in other terms, that the culture of the last man cannot be suppressed, while the overman can still offer an exit out of modernity but only as a historical ideal, valid under the specific historical conditions of present time. The overman cannot claim any transcendent legitimacy beyond the particular historical contradictions which made its emergence possible.

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[75] Cf. R. Pippin, "Irony and Affirmation in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*", in M. A. Gillespie and T. B. Strong (ed.), *Nietzsche's New Seas*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, pp. 45-71, p. 52.

Further details on the actual lineaments of the overman than those I have described so far are not given by Zarathustra. Other descriptions are highly influenced by the approximately coherent patchwork of fragments that Nietzsche's scholars - including Heidegger - have tried to reconstruct out of his later notes published in the volume *Will to Power*. Whether Heidegger or Lampert are right in attributing to Zarathustra a will to alter or not to alter nature has not been discussed in this chapter, though I have rejected Lampert's interpretation. What I have tried to demonstrate, however, is that, whatever features the overman is going to take on, were he to be actualized, he cannot do away with modern culture altogether. In this respect, Zarathustra's *precipice* [76] is the precipice of modern consciousness regardless of the repugnance or delight one may experience at his dream-like, surrealistic, sometimes delirious visions. Though aware of the inescapability of this world, our will cannot help but reaching, 'from the abysses of its depths', for what is high while being kept firm to the ground by the fetters of history.

V. Conclusion

At the conclusion of my revisitation of Rousseau and Nietzsche, a few points must be highlighted. I began my study with an analysis of Rousseau as the most remote philosophical source to have carried out the transformation of the concept of human nature into a historical and dialectical notion. It is Rousseau's merit to have demonstrated 1) that the inauguration of history occurred when important evolutionary changes took place in human nature; and 2) that it is in the clutches of the dialectical relationship between humanity's biological evolution and its own historical activity that the dilemma of progress and modern civilization must be disentangled.

Yet, Rousseau is also aware that history is not capable of its own to account for the historical process, thus needing the aid of philosophical abstraction. Consequently, he admits that the question whether history displays humanity progressively moving towards the better must be confronted within the context of a philosophy of history. However, as soon as Rousseau discovers the historicity of human life, he escapes from it. The transience of human affairs appears to him as too an unstable ground to sustain the high demands of morality and happiness.

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[76] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II, 21, p. 164.

It is Nietzsche, instead, that embraces in its most radical implications the inexorable fact of the becoming of life. He acknowledges the illusory nature of man's attempts to escape time's passing away through metaphysical flights in a transcendent 'Beyond' and sets for himself the task of affirming life as it is. The thought of eternal return articulates the rejection of a perfect world of being beyond all becoming while the overman embodies the ideal of a more advanced but still historical type of man. But, who is the overman? And how can this ideal be reconciled with the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same? A more precise answer to these questions can now be given: the overman is the self-transparency of the superior synthesis who, by virtue of knowing all the moments - master and slave types - in the past which produced his own complex unity as outcome, wills the eternal return both of them and of himself so as to manifest his gratitude for the contribution that these diverse parts have given to his life as a whole. He wills eternal return because he sees how all the one-sided, previous human types that are now entrenched in his own complex constitution in form of drives and practices play a positive role in himself. Therefore, he transports this lesson to the world as a whole. To say 'yes' to his own flourishing implies that he has to proclaim a wider and more binding 'yes' to the world as it is and has been, thus embracing in one fleeting retrospective glimpse the goodness intrinsic in all its parts.

But if the thought of eternal return is the metaphor for the overman's temporal stretch, 'Nietzsche's historical story suggests a dialectical progression from master to slave to the overman'.[77] As Richardson claims, Nietzsche thinks the movement from the disappearance of the master type to the degeneration and sickness of the last man dialectically, 'as a retreat that could allow a great advance, as this sickness is taken up into a "higher health".'[78]

The focus of the overman embracing becoming and willing eternal return is the future, the constant effort of incorporating *sickness* into *health.* The overman, to follow Richardson's prose, 'acts in the view that his practice has come from and will go back into ways of life ambiguously other than this one that defines him. He makes his new self *as* out of something other and *as* on the way to becoming something other again. He shapes an organized viewpoint (and practice) out of the disparate forces he finds at hand, giving

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[77] Cf. J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, cit., p. 68.

[78] Cf. J. Richardson, ibid., p. 133.

these parts a richer expression and sense. But he shapes this viewpoint not as an end or culmination but as one to be given a richer sense in turn, by being itself destroyed and replaced.'[79]

There is a quasi-utopian dimension in Nietzsche's project of overcoming nihilism which, in spite of its anti-humanist connotations, is fully compatible with the idea of progress. Nietzsche envisages an ideal of human type which should result from a historical and dialectical process. Although he rejects the modern idea of progress as it has unfolded itself in the history of the last man, he embraces the deeper essence lying at the core of that idea: dialectical progression and synthetic structure. At this point, I turn the same question to the other great critic of progress: Heidegger. In his reading of the history of the Western world, does he share with Nietzsche the same hidden dialectical structure?

I will deal with this question in the next chapter.

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[79] Cf. J. Richardson, ibid., p. 139.

5

THE PROPHET OF NOTHING

Heidegger's Dangerous Path of Thinking

I. Introduction

In accounting for the history of nihilism, Nietzsche understood himself as a prophet who, on the basis of a profound knowledge of what happened in the past, traced the outlines of what would happen in the future. Nietzsche died without witnessing much of what he had foreseen, but his prophesies cast a far-reaching light on the meditations of entire generations of philosophers. Later, when Heidegger took on himself the task of disclosing the recondite meaning of Nietzsche's deep thought, he assumed that he would also inherit from his predecessor the gift of prophecy so as he would be allowed to predict the impending destiny of modern civilization.

Heidegger conceived of his oracular role as a hermeneutical activity of deconstruction of fixed and rigid interpretations of an original revelation. There is no true prophet, however, without a divinity who dispatches his messages to the common mortals through the sacerdotal interpretative mediation of decoding and deciphering. Heidegger believed that the historical epochs that humanity inhabited across the centuries were epiphenomenal manifestations of an underlying revelation of Being. He thought that Being had first appeared in an abysmal form to the early Greeks and that those people, struck by wonder and awe at the terrifying spectacle featuring before their eyes, reacted by setting up myths, inventing gods and creating great works of art, thus initiating the world of what would later become known as Western civilization.

Yet, Heidegger believed also that at a relatively advanced stage of the Greek world, namely at the time of Plato, a digression from the primordial interpretation of Being occurred. A onesided, constricted interpretation of Being in the form of metaphysics came to prevail and covered up the disclosing event of Being as such. This deviation from the original path of Being, he argued, gave impulse to a series of misconceptions and misunderstandings from which the true essence of Being has never been retrieved again.

Heidegger read therefore the history of Western civilization as the history of nihilism, that is as the history of obliviousness to Being. He derived from his hermeneutical enquiries the conviction that this history of decline was culminating in the world of global technology in which all the logical possibilities contemplated in the fatal, initial metaphysical digression were being played out. Eventually, he thought, at the end of modernity the realignment of history with the path of Being was made possible again.

It was at that turning point in history, when signs announcing the imminent new beginning were allegedly appearing everywhere, that Heidegger could throw his prophetic power into the political *arena*. He set out then to attune himself to the revelation of Being by embarking on the hermeneutical task of rediscovering what had been left unthought in the past history of humanity and projecting that which he could still work out as alive possibility into the future. Nevertheless, history was to prove a severe judger for his prophetic ambitions. His predictions turned out to be disastrous. Later, when he was asked to give reasons for his commitment to National Socialism, he retreated conspicuosly from his sacerdotal postures. Still, he maintained that what he called 'the inner truth of National Socialism' was valid, even though he confessed that he could not help to effect any direct transformation of the present state of the world. 'Philosophy is over', he asserted (prophesied again?), and 'only a god can save us'.

In this chapter, I abstain from considering the political dimension of Heidegger's thought and focus instead on the ontological side of his philosophy. I demonstrate how his political downfall is the reflection of a more fundamental logical and theoretical failure. My aim is to delineate a sketch of the history of what I call, following Zimmerman, 'productionist metaphysics', and account for the emergence, in the Heideggerean longed-for post-metaphysical era, of a new type of man, *homo humanus,* out of the overcoming of the *animale rationale* who has been nurtured by the humanistic tradition. I also demonstrate that, despite the dialectical framework Heidegger devises in order to 'rationalize' the process leading to the appearance of the type *homo humanus*, this process is not to be regarded as a kind of progressive development toward an ultimate mature individual but as a negative fulfillment of an original, vital possibility that has been lost in the course of history.

II. Metaphysics as the History of Nihilism

In his attempt to explain the course of Western history, Heidegger focuses on the essential movement which defines the entire development of modern civilization and which he captures under the Nietzschean expression *nihilism*.

Nihilism, as Nietzsche described it, is the historical process of the devaluing of the highest values. For Heidegger, who set out to interpret Nietzsche's thought in depth, as long as the source from which these supreme values draw their worth and meaning is God - a name that in Nietzsche's vocabulary, Heidegger clarifies, stands for the transcendent in general, that is for ideals and norms, principles and rules which are set above the sphere of the worldly beings in order to confer upon them an order and a purpose - nihilism can be also defined as the historical process whereby the dominance of God becomes null and void. Besides, Heidegger thinks that, since the philosophical investigations into the truth of beings have been prerogative across the centuries of the discipline of metaphysics, the event of the death of God is at the same time the event of the end of metaphysics.

However, he claims that the fact that former values now are devalued and the dominance of the transcendent becomes superfluous does not bring about a purely nihilistic conception which sees the world as something to be denied and annihilated and human history a futile process. Heidegger is adamant to point out that for Nietzsche 'the end of metaphysics does not mean the end of history'[1]. When Nietzsche declares that God is dead, Heidegger expounds, he calls for humanity to free itself from all its metaphysical constraints and perform the task of a new valuation. The collapse of the realm of the transcendent is therefore both experienced as an event of liberation and perceived as a prelude to a new fulfilment. In this respect, however, Nietzsche's project of revaluation of values should not be regarded as a mere operation of replacement of old values with new ones. Rather, the act of revaluing all previous values goes far beyond the repudiation of the values themselves. It implies that the very place for previous values, that is the place in the transcendent, is eradicated and the nature and direction of valuation is transformed.

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche wants to make the new valuation proceed from the realm of beings themselves, whose basic character he defines as will to power. In his view, the interpretation of beings in terms of power and enhancement of power serves as 'a principle for the inscription of a new table of values and as a standard of measure for

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[1] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1982, p.5.

suitably ranking such values'[2]. However, Heidegger argues, 'will to power as a principle for the new valuation tolerates no end outside of being as a whole.' Hence, 'because all being as will to power - that is as incessant self-overpowering - must be a continual *becoming*, and because such *becoming* cannot move "toward an end" outside its own "farther and farther", but is ceaselessly caught up in the cyclical increase of power to which it reverts, then being as a whole too, as this power-conforming becoming, must always itself recur again and bring back the same[3].'

In brief, Heidegger explains that Nietzsche's definition of life as becoming does not purport to posit a final goal towards which life points in its continual and endless progression. Becoming, as overpowering of power, is for him the eternal recurrence of the same. In its apparent incessant flowing, he says, becoming constantly returns to itself. As a consequence, given that the transcendent has been abolished and only the earth has been left as the horizon within which the new standards of order and measure are to be raised, nihilism faces the task of devising new immanent criteria to take man as he has been until now out of and over himself. To this purpose, Nietzsche fashions the figure of the Overman as the prototype man should conform to in overcoming himself. The Overman is 'the most singular form of human existence who leaves the man of traditional values behind, overtakes him, and transfers the justification for all laws and the positing of all values to the will to power.[4] '

Nietzsche having defined nihilism as the process of the devaluing of the highest values, Heidegger wonders how and in what aspect nihilism is connected to valuative thought. After all, he points out, nihilism is concerned with the nothing which, in a logical sense, is merely the negation of beings. Yet, there is another sense of Being, Heidegger emphasizes, which no logical and methodical thought has ever considered. The fact that the nothing is not a being or an object does not imply that this non-objective matter is simply a nullity. The confusion on this point in the metaphysical tradition suggests, according to Heidegger, that the essence of metaphysics has not yet been adequately formulated. No one, he complains, has ever conceived of the possibility that the nothing is neither a being nor simply null, and this omission explains why Western metaphysics has given the way to the triumph of nihilism.

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[2] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 6.
[3] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 7.
[4] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 9.

Nietzsche's philosophical parabola is in itself emblematic, for Heidegger, of the extent to which logical thought failed to think about the essence of the nothing. Although Nietzsche recognized nihilism as the ultimate movement of modern Western history, he was unable to grasp the notion of the nothing as something different from the mere counteressence to all beings. Consequently, Heidegger claims, he apprehended nihilism on the basis of valuative thought as the process of the devaluing of the highest values. Seen in this light, Nietzsche appears to Heidegger's eyes 'to have thought metaphysically, remained on the path of the history of metaphysics, and brought metaphysics to its conclusion.[5]

Evaluative thought is, in Heidegger's analysis of Western philosophy, at the core of metaphysics and contains in its essence a particular interpretation of Being. The dominance of valuative thought in metaphysics is made evident, according to him, by the inner coherence of valuation and the will to power. All metaphysics is, at least potentially, Heidegger claims Nietzsche as saying, metaphysics of the will to power. It is value positing: it thinks in terms of values and reckons with values. Metaphysics postulates, for instance, the categories of unity, totality, truth, and purpose as the highest values. These determinations of the beings are regarded as cosmological values in Greek philosophy and become in the modern metaphysical interpretation of the Being of beings 'categories of reason'.

Now, in order to show how the essence of nihilism lies in valuative thought and how valuation has its principle in the will to power, Heidegger undertakes a tortuous path. He begins with the Nietzschean insight that nihilism is history. Then, he sets out to inquire into the history of metaphysics and discerns a transition in it from an initial revelation to a later forgetfulness, and eventually comes to the conclusion that nihilism is the inner logic of the history of Western metaphysics. A deeper examination of Heidegger's line of reasoning will cast light on the consistency of his argument.

Heidegger understands Western history as the history of man's attempts to answer the question 'What is being?'. This question puzzled the early Greeks, he says, provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, and became after the philosophical investigations of the latter theme of a specific discipline named 'metaphysics'. He reads therefore in the Greeks' articulation of their experience of Being into metaphysics the

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[5] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid.

starting point of the history of the West. Being appeared first to them as something abysmal and totally incomprehensible, he claims, an *aporia* whose unresolvability evoked mysteriousness and ineffability. However, struck by the wonder of Being, the Greeks were led to think and speak in a fundamental sense of their enigmatic encounter with it. Thus, they invented the Olympic gods, set up the *polis*, created the tragedies and philosophy; in other terms, founded a world whose structure and character has become known as 'Greek civilization'.

Therefore, it was confrontation with the question of Being the primordial fact, Heidegger believes, from which descended the struggle of the most creative minds among the Greeks to determine a new ontological horizon for themselves, thus giving birth to the Greek world and through the Greeks to the West itself.[6]

In the Books IV and VII of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle raised the question of metaphysics as a question of essence. By moving from the assumption that there was an equivalence between the question of Being and the question of essence, he demanded that philosophy focused primarily on a particular being and only later, on a second level of analysis, paid attention to its Being and essence. In Heidegger's view, when Aristotle posed the question 'What is Being?' he meant 'What is the Being of a being?', that is 'What is the essence of a particular thing?'. The direction of his question was then toward the particular being as such[7]. This Aristotelian attitude toward Being is what Heidegger regards as 'metaphysical', for 'in order to apprehend the particular being as a being, it strides over and beyond the particular being - *meta ta physica* - toward Being.[8]'

In founding metaphysics as a science, Aristotle demarcated also the scope of its inquiries. Although Being appears to be undefinable, he demonstrated that it does not resist every attempt at formulation. We speak of a being in many and different ways, for example, as regard to its being a magnitude i.e. according to the category of quantity, or as regard to its being heavy i.e. according to the category of quality. But all these varying ways of being are related to one cardinal principle of unity, that is the *ousia*, the essence. In order to make the relationship between Being and the various ways to be of a being more intelligible, Aristotle draws in the Book IV of *Metaphysics* an analogy between Being

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[6] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 135-36.

[7] Cf. W. Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, Evanston, 1971, p. 17.

[8] Cf. W. Marx, ibid.

and health. The multiform occurrences of being, he claims, refer to one single meaning of being in the same way that a healthy complexion or a healthy medicine or a healthy march refer to the one signification *health*, which determines them all as its modes[9]. No polysemy takes place in these disparate uses of *health* and *being,* since these words are permeated by a univocal reference to the *ousia*. The task of the philosopher, Aristotle states, is therefore to concentrate his attention on the ultimate grounds of *ousia* and raise the question about essence whenever the sense of Being is involved.

The account Aristotle gives about the ambit of metaphysics proves, for Heidegger, that he was concerned only with the constitution of the Being of the cosmological and earthly beings, and not at all with the sense of Being as such. Aristotle asked about the 'what' of the particular being, the 'what' of that which, according to Heidegger, is brought into presence by Being, but not about the phenomenon of presenting itself. Yet, Aristotle is not the only objective of Heidegger's attack. The essential aim of his analysis of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is to demonstrate that Aristotle's interpretation of Being as *ousia* and substance strongly influenced the development of the whole history of Western thought. Heidegger claims that even modernity, the historical age which begins with Descartes and culminates in Nietzsche, belongs to the metaphysical tradition, since it embodies the Platonic and Aristotelian ontological doctrines that forget any authentic and genuine interrogation of Being.

Heidegger distinguishes between two different ways of questioning Being: the *Leitfrage*, or 'guiding question', and the *Grundfrage*, or 'grounding question'. Whereas the guiding question raises issues about a delimited domain of beings or even all the beings considered as a whole, the grounding question asks only about the meaning of Being as such, without taking for granted 'the standard ways in which our understanding of Being has been thematized by philosophy and science.[10]' The forgetfulness to which modern thought has fallen prey consists precisely, according to Heidegger, in not having developed the grounding question and having instead inherited in an uncritical way the metaphysical pre-determinations of Being.

In pursuing the grounding question, Heidegger purports to encourage a form of

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[9] Cf. W. Marx, ibid. For an understanding of Aristotle's point, Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, The University of Michigan Press, 1960, IV, 1003a31-1003b19; plus J. Barnes, *Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 39-46.

[10] Cf. R. B. Pippin, "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Metaphysics of Modernity", in K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 282-310, p. 291.

thinking that acknowledges the ontological difference between Being and the beings as well as thematizes an understanding of Being which is more proximate to the phenomenology of our experience of it. In his view, all our dealings with the beings presuppose an implicit, pre-ontological, and non-thematic familiarity with the meaning of Being. He states that *Dasein*, as Being-in the-world, prior to its making of the world an object of its representing, is always already involved in the world. It does not first encounter the beings out there in the world from the isolated monad of its own consciousness and then determines their Being by reckoning which representations match up with the way beings are. Rather, the mode of being of *Dasein* is to be always already provided with fore-knowledge, though vague and indistinct, of Being and to exist in a condition of permanent familiarity with it.

Given the occurrence of such an original phenomenological experience of Being, what remains unthought in the metaphysical tradition, according to Heidegger, is, as Pippin puts it, 'what is pre-predicative in our experience, what allows beings to be originally present, always already "illuminated" in some way or other, such that we can subsequently make assertions about beings so already "lit up". Being itself should be interrogated as this illumination itself, even though when so interrogated, because all such illumination always already seems to presuppose such an orientation, we end up formulating the meaning of being ontically, as if again we were formulating an *Aussage*, an assertion about it... It is as if Heidegger means to somehow address such "non-objects" [the elusive, non-representable, concealed character of Being] as the eternal sourceless light in a Cezanne landscape, a light that isn't in the painting, or isn't an object painted, but is that by means of which the "world of Cezanne" can possess its disturbing qualities of great stillness and great tension, as if at once supremely objective and weighty, and chaotic, threatening to come apart.[11]'

Metaphysics' failure to raise the grounding question and think Being is for Heidegger at the basis of the disaster of modernity. In his view, modernity is the latest unfolding of the history of metaphysics initiated by Plato and Aristotle. It begins by proclaiming the values of freedom, emancipation from the constraints of religion, and scientific progress and ends up in world technology and totalitarianism. Modernity is nothing but the grab of reason and enlightenment in which metaphysics wraps itself. It is nihilistic because

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[11] Cf. R. B. Pippin, ibid., p. 291.

metaphysics as metaphysics is in its essence nihilistic[12]. The difference between the nihilism of modern metaphysics and the nihilism of the early stages of development of it is simply that modern nihilism brings to light peremptorily the nihilistic content remained concealed in the metaphysical doctrines of Plato and Aristotle.

This formulation of the question of modernity amounts to the assertion that metaphysics is fundamentally nihilistic because it leaves Being unthought. It also marks an important dividing line between Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophies of history. For Nietzsche, nihilism is the history of the devaluing of the highest values; for Heidegger, it is the history of the forgetfulness of Being. Nevertheless, if Being has remained unthought through the unfolding of Western metaphysics, it is not the fault of metaphysics, but of Being itself. Metaphysics fails to think Being because Being withdraws and denies itself to the apprehending structures of our thought. Following Heidegger's reconstruction of the origins of our civilization, we discover that only the pre-Socratics caught a full glimpse of Being, thus starting off the history of the of the West out of their experience of revelation of Being. Afterwards came Plato and Aristotle whose philosophical doctrines cast the first veil of obscurity upon the ontological difference between Being and the beings. This process of concealment was further deepened by medieval Christianity and finally brought to completion in and through the subjectivistic turn of modernity.

In its historical course from the original revelation to utter progressive withdrawal, Being does not merely disappear. It is always thought, but only in terms of beings, as the 'what' of the beings. While the effect of the primordial glimpse into the essence of Being increasingly fades away, Being is experienced as *hypokeimenon* or *fundamentum*, that is as what lies beneath or behind the beings. Though apprehended in a vague way, it is regarded to be self-evident and tautological. Thus, left unquestioned, it is neglected and forgotten, enjoying a status of obviousness beyond the clutches of the categories of thought.

Nietzsche, despite his claims that enlightened and rationalized modernity is a self-serving delusion, does not escape from the history of forgetfulness of Being, either. In maintaining that everything is will to power, Heidegger argues, he propounds a metaphysical thesis in the shape of an all-embracing teaching on the beings as a whole. He asserts that all beings are beings as will to power, and that they struggle relentlessly for

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[12] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, cit., p. 205.

ever more power. Hence, 'since Being is determined as a value and is consequently explained in terms of beings as a condition posited by the will to power... Being is not acknowledged as Being.[13]'

Nietzsche's failure to think of Being as such represents the completion of the Western metaphysical tradition. The Platonic account of Being as *eidos* and the Nietzschean account of Being as value constitute, for Heidegger, the antipodes of a unique and comprehensive historical process which has systematically covered up the true essence of Being. What is peculiar about Nietzsche's thought, however, is that it is especially representative of the metaphysics of subjectivity which was inaugurated by Descartes's subjectivistic turn and further developed by Leibnitz's, Schelling's and Hegel's attempts to determine the will as the self-grounding ground of the beings.

From this account of Nietzsche's effort to unmask modernity and recreate a new sense of history and the future Heidegger draws the conclusion that Nietzsche is erroneous to believe that his transvaluation of modern values could overcome nihilism. On the contrary, he argues, 'to think as Nietzsche does of the will to power in terms of the eternal recurrence of the same and to think of Becoming as the Being of the totality of beings corresponds to the supreme form of nihilism.[14]' In fact, in positing new values according to the principle of the will to power, Nietzsche transforms Being into a value - a thing, a being, something that can be defined - thus proclaiming that 'there is nothing to Being itself'. Consequently, 'Nietzsche's metaphysics... is the ultimate entanglement in nihilism. Through value thinking in terms of will to power, it of course continues to acknowledge beings as such. But, by tying itself to an interpretation of Being as value, it simultaneously binds itself to the impossibility of ever casting an inquiring glance at Being as Being. By means of the entanglement of nihilism in itself, nihilism first becomes thoroughly complete in what it is. Such utterly completed perfect nihilism is the fulfilment of nihilism proper.[15]'

Nietzsche fails to overcome nihilism because he fails to grasp the essence of it. He understands the element of negativity implicit in nihilism metaphysically, that is in terms of devaluation and decline, even though his idea of will to power is not to be identified with a substance that manifests itself in an enervated and weakened manner. Heidegger is well aware of Nietzsche's reluctance to make *de re* assertions about the essence of

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[13] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 201.
[14] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 202.
[15] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 203.

beings. He knows that Nietzsche, with his claim that the world is will to power, does not mean to point to the ultimate essence of reality but to affirm in the most radical way the fleeting constitution of the world. On Nietzsche's account, what the world is is the result of competing interpretations of the world and these interpretations are constantly changing. Yet, Heidegger maintains that there is a continuity between the modern metaphysical attempts to ground the Being of beings in subjectivity and Nietzsche's explanation of the origin of any possible determination of the world in terms of the interpretative human activity, and this continuity he sets out to address.

As compared to the achievements of Kant and the German post-Kantian idealists, Nietzsche's philosophical advancement consists, for Heidegger, in denying the existence of any logical or conceptual constraints capable of limiting the subject's representing activity. Once the immediate and the positive have been denied 'existence in itself' and referred back to the subject for grounding, no transcendental necessity is left to govern the way in which the subject constructs and determines its own object. A priori categories turn out to be ineffectual, as the ground of subjectivity refuses to recognize that principles and rules may restrain its 'human, all too human' drive for manipulation and self-affirmation. Therefore, Nietzsche is 'the "truth" of modern philosophy, the revelation that there is no way to moderate or qualify the subjectivistic turn, the turn to the subject as source or ground. Such a source grounds by itself standing on "nothing".[16]'

To summarize: the metaphysical nature of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power lies, for Heidegger, in its inclination to value thinking. Alike the whole modern metaphysical tradition, Nietzsche thinks of Being in terms of values, so that Being as such remains unthought. But, since metaphysics as metaphysics is nihilistic, Nietzsche's teaching of the will to power is nihilistic too. Metaphysics is nihilistic in two different senses: in a deeper sense, it is nihilistic because, by claiming that Being is *eidos* or the soul or the subject or a value, it implies that 'there is nothing to Being'. In a more superficial sense, metaphysics is nihilistic because it is the historical movement that culminates in the

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[16] Cf. R. B. Pippin, "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Metaphysics of Modernity", art. cit., p. 300.

death of God and man's abysmal realization that the world has no foundations[17]. Heidegger takes for granted this second version of nihilism in which it is seen as the history of Western civilization, but he regards its narrative of the decline of the West as an epiphenomenal manifestation of more fundamental facts taking place on the ontological level of Being itself. Hence, he sets out to trace the history of the forgetfulness of Being which leads him to discover that nothing constitutes the essence of Being. Thus, he devises an ontological framework on the order of the realm of Being from whose vantage point he embarks on an attack against Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power as the fulfilment of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity.

Although Nietzsche considered his thought to be a countermovement to metaphysics, Heidegger contends that he remained deeply entangled in it. From his own vantage point, he discovers that Descartes's subjectivistic turn introduces in the history of metaphysics the hubristic principle of man's self-determination. Beings are no longer considered as independent entities standing in the world on their own right, but their constitution depends on what an essentially self-defining and representing free subject decides to take them to be. Heidegger continues his analysis claiming that the modern subjectivistic tendency to self-affirmation is actually true of the whole metaphysical tradition since Plato, and that it comes to an end in Nietzsche's account of Being as will to power. Consequently, Nietzsche fails to overcome nihilism and his position is then to be understood as an extreme attempt to establish dominion over the earth through a project of totalitarian world technology.

A more detailed examination of the relationship between nihilism and the metaphysics of subjectivity, along with a clarification of the deeper sense of nihilism outlined above, will be given in the next section.

III. Early Modernity and Emergence of Subjectivity

Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche, by transforming the question of Being into a question

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[17] A synthetic passage from Heidegger's comment on Nietzsche reads thus: 'Metaphysics is history's open space wherein it becomes a destining that the suprasensory world, the Ideas, God, the moral law, the authority of reason, progress, the happiness of the greatest number, culture, civilization suffer the loss of their constrictive force and become void.' Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York, 1979, pp. 53-112, 65.

of values posited by a subject, brings to a completion the modern metaphysical tradition is a part of a more comprehensive understanding of modernity as the unfolding of the subjectivistic drive for self-affirmation. To be sure, Heidegger holds that the dominance of the subjective does not permeate merely the age inaugurated by Descartes, but also embraces, though in a latent form, the larger extension of the Western metaphysical history, which includes the Platonic postulating of a realm of eternal forms above the sensible and changeable beings as well as the Christian search for salvation in the self-creating substance of God.

However, before embarking on the task of tracing Heidegger's analysis of the emergence of subjectivity in modernity, a digression is needed in order to account for his ontological speculation on the essence of Being.

Underlying Heidegger's diagram of his philosophy of history is the assumption that Being has always secretly guided the course of metaphysics and Western history. The inauguration of the history of Western civilization in the shape of a metaphysical detachment of man from the ground of Being traces back, in Heidegger's reconstruction, to the Greek world whose inhabitants first caught a glimpse of Being in its abysmal and aporetic nature. The mysteriousness that the ineffability of Being evoked led them to think in the manner of *mythos* and *logos,* so that the combination of the epiphany of Being and man's wonder at receiving its appeal gave birth to the Greek civilization, from whose impulse the subsequent epochs in Western history followed.

The emergence in Western history of different ages depends therefore upon the multiform ways in which man experiences the question of Being. However, although man has given across the centuries many different answers to this question, all those answers, by way of belonging to the metaphysical tradition, share a common fundamental understanding of it. Thus, given that Being is thought metaphysically in terms of whatness or essence, all metaphysical answers to the question it poses are metaphysical interpretation of the "essence", which asks about the "what" of beings as such. As a consequence, Heidegger derives that Being remains unthought in metaphysics and that any reflection on it is prevented from discovering the extent to which it enters into relation to beings.

Yet, Heidegger contends that if Being is unthought in metaphysics, that is not the fault of metaphysical thinking. After all, in it Being is not thoroughly overlooked. On the contrary, in order to recognize beings as such, metaphysics needs to know Being as the

Being of beings. Hence, Heidegger states that the main lapse for the omission of Being in metaphysics resides in Being itself:

> Even when it does not express itself as ontotheology [metaphysics is inherently ontology and theology, for Heidegger, because it speaks of the *theion* in the sense of the highest existing ground], metaphysics asserts and knows itself as a thinking that always and everywhere thinks "Being", although only in the sense of the being as such. Of course, metaphysics does not recognize this "although only". And it does not recognize it, not because it repudiates Being itself as to-be-thought, *but because Being itself stays away*. But if that is so, then the "unthought" does not stem from a thinking that neglects something.[18]

Being stays away, Heidegger claims. Being occurs as the unconcealment in which the beings come to presence, but the unconcealment itself, in order to allow the beings to stand in view, remains concealed. Being, as unconcealment, keeps away, holds to itself, while the beings, insofar they are beings, stand in the withdrawal of Being. In other terms, Being exists in its being absent, as the obscure source of the cleared horizon within which beings emerge in the fullness of their practical significance.

The distinctive nature of metaphysics consists however in forgetting not just the unconcealment of Being, but also the further concealment that itself perpetrates with regard to the forgetfulness of Being. While in metaphysical thought the withdrawal of Being is omitted, metaphysics omits even the omission as such[19].Therefore, the essence of metaphysics rests upon a double concealment: on the one hand, metaphysics conceals Being because, by giving answers to the question of Being, it takes Being away from the realm of the question itself, that is from the realm of the unconcealment of Being. On the other hand, insofar as it answers the question "what is Being?" by focusing onesidedly upon the essence or whatness of Being as the Being of beings, it closes off all other interpretations and covers up its own hermeneutic status of being just one interpretation, among many possible others, of the unconcealment of Being.

Given that Being, by revealing itself, opens up in each epoch a particular configuration of the world, that is a particular horizon in which Being and the beings are related to one another, the sequence of epochs across history is determined by the different ways in which Being both withdraws and concedes itself. Besides, since each epoch is characterized by the particular answer it gives to the question of Being and since each answer reflects a unilateral interpretation of it, the succession of epochs in the history of

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[18] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, cit., p. 213.
[19] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid. p. 219.

the West describes a sequence of particular forms of misrepresantation of Being. In fact, while each epoch provides an answer to the question of Being, the question itself, that is Being, is forgotten. Therefore, as each epoch reveals the truth about beings but disguises the truth about the unconcealment of Being, a progressively increasing degree of misrepresentation is attached to the sequence of epochs that compose the history of Western metaphysics.

Whether the transformation of the relationship between Being and the beings underpinning the transition in the history of metaphysics from one epoch to the successive follows logical and dialectical necessity or is determined by an arbitrary and inscrutable change in the way Being appears and withdraws, is an issue to be tackled later in this chapter. What I intend to point out at the present time is instead the unitary and coherent character of metaphysics as the history of the obliviousness to Being. Thus Heidegger emphasizes this aspect:

> Being itself withdraws. The withdrawal happens. The abandonment by Being of the beings as such takes place. When does it happen? Now? Only yesterday? Or a long time ago? How long has it been? Since when? Since the being came into the unconcealed as the being itself. Metaphysics has prevailed ever since this unconcealment occurred; for metaphysics is the history of the unconcealment of the being as such. Since that history came to be, there has historically been a withdrawal of Being itself; there has been an abandonment by Being of beings as such; there has been a history in which there is nothing to Being itself. Consequently, and from that time on, Being itself has remained unthought.[20]

I now return to the question I earlier left suspended of Heidegger's analysis of the emergence of subjectivity in modernity. However, let me first scrutinize the progression of the stages in the history of the unconcealment of Being whose unfolding leads, according to Heidegger, to the advent of modernity.

As mentioned above, Heidegger believes that the early Greeks were the first individuals in Western history to experience the question of Being as an aporetic question and to live in the proximity of its mysteriousness. Parmenides, Heracliteus and Anaximander initiated the tragic age of Greek civilization, an age in which men, struck by the wonder of Being, continually reasserted the question it posed without indulging in one or another realm of answers that were contingently offered. The withdrawal of Being as a question begins with the Sophists who, by ceasing to ask about the truth of Being, let the

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[20] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 215.

question of Being become submerged in the answers it evoked, so that Being was impeded to resurface as a question. Socrates, with his dialectical examination of opinions, attempted to turn the Sophistic tide once again toward the aporetic ground of Being, but he was taken over by Plato whose doctrine of real and apparent beings provided a fatal answer to the question of Being. Plato reversed the common sense belief that what is bodily, touchable and mutable truly exists and recognized full reality only to the unchanging forms that constitute the essence of beings. Being, in his ontology, does not disappear though, but appears constantly in conjunction with the Being of beings. Nevertheless, this kind of appearing of Being as the universal essence lying behind the sensuous presence of beings is conducive to a more thorough concealment of it. In fact, 'insofar as Being appears at all, it is not missed and thus not called into question but always and everywhere overlooked, recognized but recognized only as something self-evident and tautological and thus as something unworthy of investigation. In disappearing as a question, Being thus reappears as the highest answer, as the ultimate or final ground of beings. Henceforth, the question of the ground becomes the central question of metaphysics and the West.[21]'

Accordingly, a shift in the understanding of truth occurs in the transition from Socrates and the pre-Socratics to Plato. Whereas the formers located truth in the realm of the aporetic and drew a tragic relish from dwelling in the proximity of Being where they could be struck by its mysteriousness, the latter aims at overcoming the revelation of truth as aporia by recognizing Being as constant presence. In contradistinction to the ephemerality of the attributes of becoming, permanence and invariability compose the distinctive traits of the supreme Being in the new ontological hierarchy that Plato sets out to articulate.

The forgetfulness of the unconcealment of Being that occurs in Plato is, for Heidegger, the determinative ground of metaphysics and ontology. Following him, in fact, Aristotle develops his ontological orientation into a productionist metaphysics, given that he conceives of all things as formed matter, that is as products of a labouring process of giving form to a raw material. Aristotle transforms also the notion of Being once more. When he asks 'what is the Being of this thing?', he means 'what is the cause of it?'. For Aristotle, to be means to be effected, caused and produced. In addition, he turns this sense of making into a conscious planning, i.e. a *theoria* based upon the observation of eternal

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[21] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and The Ground of History*, op. cit., p. 142.

models or ends[22], that is constantly present entities that make possible the appearance of their evanescent and sensuous counterparts.

A further withdrawal of Being occurs in the translation of Greek into Latin, followed by the transformation of the whole categorial apparatus of metaphysics into the Christian theological system. In the Latin assimilation, the metaphysical dualism of Being and appearance, which by now has been institutionalized in the discipline of philosophy and hence embedded in language, takes on the connotation of a dualism between "idea" and "actualitas" or "essentia" and existentia". Similarly, the expression *physis*, "the shining forth", that in Greek denotes Being and carries with it the semantic nuance of "coming into presence" is replaced by *natura*, which implies birth and growth. Therefore, as Gillespie explains in his account of Heidegger's philosophy of history, 'the sense of Being as a sudden and inexplicable revelation is concealed, and it appears instead as a natural process of action and reaction, as a chain of causes and effects.[23]'

Furthermore, the Romans introduce the first wave of humanism in history. They understand man as *animal rationale*. This definition, Heidegger emphasizes, 'is not simply the Latin translation of the Greek *zoon logon echon* but rather a metaphysical interpretation of it.[24]' While the expression *zoon* incorporates an interpretation of life as the coming into presence of the living being within the realm of *physis*, the term *animal* suggests a biological interpretation of man as a purely 'organic thing'. The fact that the adjective *rational* accompanies the noun *animal* to determine and qualify its meaning, thus indicating that the being we are dealing with is not just one living creature among others but is endowed with a *ratio*, that is with a 'faculty of categories' and a 'faculty of principles', does not change in a fundamental sense the biologism implicit in the Roman metaphysical interpretation of man. *Ratio* remains in any case grounded in *animal* and *animal* constitutes the essence of *humanitas*.

In the chasm opened up by the Romans between Being as the realm of *essentia* and beings as the realm of *existentia,* Christianity finds a space into which to wedge itself. It introduces a new revelation of Being that discloses each being as the *ens creatum*, that is

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[22] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, ibid., p. 144.
[23] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, ibid., p. 145.
[24] Cf. M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *Basic Writings*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, pp. 193-242, p. 202.

as that which is created by the personal Creator God[25]. To be means, in the Christian vocabulary, to belong to a specific rank of the order of the universe created by God. Within that order, man and the world fall to a lower level than in the previous ontological hierarchies, the grade of being of both being now established by their relationship to God.

As a consequence of the Christian revelation which removes Being out of nature into transcendence where it becomes the highest cause of all beings, a further withdrawal of Being occurs. Nevertheless, out of this deepened absence of Being, a new vitality emerges. The further withdrawal of Being brings in fact the ontological question back to the context in which the early Greeks posed it, deprived of the metaphysical distinction of Being and appearance. Being, which has now retreated into nothing, is experienced again as something mysterious and aporetic. Yet, as Gillespie remarks, 'this experience of Being is the experience not of its presence but of its even greater absence and thus leads not to a creative rebirth of the tragic age but to a further radicalization of metaphysics.[26]'

The original Christian experience of Being as enigma and aporia dissolves when a neo-Platonist form of theology which combines metaphysical categories with an over abstract conceptualism derived by the interpretation of the Scriptural revelation arises. In the new ontology established by this form of Christian dogmatics, the centre of gravity is no longer the question of Being as truth, but 'a transcendent God who has created both man and nature and who has revealed himself in and as Christ.[27]'

However, despite the large use of philosophical concepts made by theology, Heidegger does not regard it as true knowledge. In his view, there is no Christian philosophy. The knowledge of God is not the result of a logical or dialectical argument, but rests upon the interpretation of the Scripture. Hence, God remains by definition incomprehensible and only the certainty of faith sustains the validity of the syncretism between Scriptural revelation and neo-Platonist theology.

The historical perspective has now been sufficiently clarified to allow me to introduce the long deferred question of the emergence of modernity.

Heidegger identifies the essential feature of modernity in the phenomenon of subjectivity. From his numerous works on this topic, modernity transpires as an age opened

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[25] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Age of The World Picture", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, cit., pp. 115-154, p. 130.
[26] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and The Ground of History*, cit., p. 146.
[27] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, ibid.

up by Descartes's *Philosophical Meditations* in which a distanced subjectivity arises as an independent entity 'standing over against' objects and judging and manipulating them for its own purposes. Here is an example:

> The traditional guiding question of metaphysics - 'What is the Being?' - is transformed at the beginning of modern metaphysics into a question about method, about the path along which the absolutely certain and secure is sought by man himself for man himself, the path by which the essence of truth is circumscribed. The question 'what is the being?' is transformed into a question about the *fundamentum absolutum inconcussum veritatis*, the absolute, unshakable ground of truth. This transformation is the beginning of a new thinking, whereby the old order passes into the new and the ensuing age becomes the modern.[28]

Heidegger propounds also a 'secularization thesis' in order to account for the origins of the modern notion of subjectivity. He claims that the positing of the subject develops out of the decline of religious certainty. When the fading of the salvation motive widens a gap between man's earthly existence and his afterlife expectations, that gap is filled with an emphatic affirmation of self-certitude:

> Man's claim to a ground of truth found and secured by man himself arises from that "liberation" in which he disengages himself from the constraints of biblical Christian revealed truth and church doctrine. Every authentic liberation, however, is not only a breaking of chains and a casting off of bonds, it is also and above all a new determination of the essence of freedom. To be free now means that, in place of the certitude of salvation, which was the standard for all truth, man posits the kind of certitude by virtue of which and in which he becomes certain of himself as the being that thus founds itself on itself.[29]

Nevertheless, in spite of turning against faith and Christian ontology, modernity remains deeply entangled in the metaphysical essence of Christianity. The renunciation of God, Heidegger emphasizes, is far from excluding religiosity. Rather, a pure religious experience replaces the loss of God, while historiographical study of myth compensates for the resultant void[30]. Heidegger discovers thus a twofold nature in the essence of modernity: on the one hand, he claims, the modern perception of the world remains fundamentally Christianized inasmuch as subjectivity is posited as the infinite, unconditional and absolute ground of the world. On the other hand, the Christian doctrine is transformed into a world view - the Christian world view, precisely - and therefore is updated and "modernized"[31].

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[28] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, p., 97.
[29] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid.
[30] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Age of The World Picture", cit., p. 117.
[31] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., pp. 116-117.

Hence, a deep parallelism runs, for Heidegger, through the Christian Middle Ages and the secularized age of modernity: the certainty of faith is equalled by the certainty of self in introspection, divine creativity is matched by world technology, and God is superseded by man as the highest Being.

Yet, subjectivity as such is not, strictly speaking, a characteristic of modernity. In *The Age of The World Picture,* Heidegger enumerates among the essential marks of modernity the mathematical science of nature, machine technology, the loss of gods, the universal process of massification and standardization of culture, and the progressive assimilation of the event of art into the scope of aesthetics. The phenomenon of subjectivity does not appear among them. The reason of this omission is that Heidegger sees subjectivity or, more precisely, the subject-object dichotomy more as the common hidden thread that runs across all the distinctive traits of modernity than as a mark of modernity itself. Subjectivity is what lies behind all the phenomena of modernity, the metaphysical ground that provides foundation for their essence. It names the way in which Being manifests (and conceals) itself in the modern age, the defining horizon within which all beings come to light and count as beings. Let us see, for instance, how the subject-object split is present and pervades the phenomenon of modern science.

The word *science* today, Heidegger says, means something fundamentally different from the Greek *episteme*[32]. Science has become a rigorous method of investigation into nature. It is based upon a preliminary stipulation of what is to be meant by nature. Nature is described as the realm of the material bodies which possess the property of motion. An event, in order to be considered as a natural event at all, must be defined in advance as a spatiotemporal magnitude of motion, so that it can be made available for the measuring exact procedures of the mathematized science of nature. Experiment is the cornerstone of modern science, especially of the physical science of nature. It provides the latter with a rigorous means of verification of the validity of its theories. In setting up an experiment, in fact, the mathematical science of nature reproduces circumstances through and in which it comes to control in advance, by means of calculation, a specific series of events as well as to subsume them under a universal law:

> Experiment is that methodology which, in its planning and execution, is supported and

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[32] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 117.

> guided on the basis of the fundamental law laid down, in order to adduce the facts that either verify and confirm the law or deny it confirmation.[33]

Confirmation of the validity of the law amounts to a provision of *explanation* of the events under investigation, which is precisely the fundamental objective modern science seeks to accomplish. All this, of course, is a far cry from what Aristotle meant by *episteme*. For him, *episteme* was based upon *empeiria*, a kind of observation of the qualities and modifications of things under changing circumstances aiming at 'the knowledge of the way in which things as a rule behave.[34]' Compared to the Aristotelian *empeiria*, the modern experiment, Heidegger argues, 'is not only an observation more precise in degree and scope, but is a methodology essentially different in kind, related to the verification of law in the framework, and at the service, of an exact plan of nature.[35]'

What makes possible the transformation of *episteme* into *modern science*, Heidegger suggests, is a new understanding of beings at the disposal of representation. Modern science would not have progressed into the sort of mathematical study of nature that it is today if there had not been preliminarily a development of truth into the certainty of representation. The essential movement behind the whole range of changes introduced by modernity, of which science is the eponymous example, is to be identified in the self's quest to secure its own reality from doubt by bringing all the external beings before the scrutinizing operations of the eye of the mind. In the course of this process, the role of subjectivity is to certify, through the methodical treatment of its *cogitationes,* the effective reality of what it is presented to. A thing gains the ontological status of "reality" only if it is liable of being represented in a rigorous way by the inner thinking activity of the self.

What is decisive in the turning of modernity, however, is not so much the unrestrained affirmation of subjectivity as the mutual interplay that initiates between subject and object. Heidegger emphasizes how, as a matter of fact, modernity, along with liberating man from an unreflective condition of subordination to external authorities of human or divine origin, has produced a kind of objectivism that was never seen in any age before. The subject is simply one terminus of a dual relation which involves also the world. It can become in modernity the being upon which the truth of the world must be grounded only because the understanding of the world has changed. The world is now conceived of

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[33] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., pp. 121-122.
[34] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 121.
[35] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 122.

and grasped as a picture, that is it has become something that man wants to bring before himself and represent.

This conception of subjectivity as the terminus of a dual relation including also the world as picture has been, for Heidegger, at the root of the Western interpretation of the reality of things almost from the very beginning. Plato's notion of *eidos* as the invisible essence of things that can be grasped only intellectually by the eye of the mind is an ancestral account of the process of knowledge that is vastly echoed in the Cartesian narration of the activity of representation. Underlying the two is a common understanding of temporality in terms of constantly available presence, which develops from the Greek belief in the appearing of the thing's being into intellectual visibility up to the modern guaranteeing of all things before the judgement of the self-present subject[36].

Insofar as Plato's notion of *eidos* is the presupposition for the world having to become picture, there must be some connection or necessity, though not accountable in terms of Hegel's dialectical development, in the history that unfolds from the Greeks to modernity. At the beginning was the Greek emergence of a thing's being out of hiddeness into open sensible and intellectual visibility. With the transition from the classical era to the Middle Ages, the intellectual and invisible eye of the mind flees from the fallible space of the empirical world to take refuge in God. The decline of religious faith at the end of the Middle Ages forces the self to turn inward in search of self-certainty. This turning allows the self to discover in its inner *cogitationes*, that is its inner thinking activity, a constantly present entity that guarantees the presence of other things. With the affirmation of the subject as representing activity that brings the world before itself as a collection of objects, we arrive at the modern age. Still, Heidegger identifies a further development within the ambit of modernity itself. The representing activity of the subject unfolds in fact as *will* to form an orderly picture of the world.

Heidegger contends that modern subjectivity exists only by imposing a self-originated order on other things. The primal source of this shaping labour that is performed by the subject upon the world in order to gain sufficient power to control the conditions of representation is nothing but an act of will[37]. The coming into play of will, a crucial element in the metaphysics of modernity, accounts therefore for the transition within

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[36] Cf. D. Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 131.
[37] Cf. D. Kolb, ibid., p. 141.

modernity itself from Descartes's search for self-certainty to Nietzsche's notion of the will to power via the mediation of Leibnitz's doctrine of the monad as the unity of perception and appetite. Let us see how this movement proceeds.

IV. Late Modernity and Dominion of Technology

As mentioned in the previous section, another essential feature of modernity which is uncovered by Heidegger and is strictly related to subjectivity is technology. In expounding his interpretation and evaluation of modern technology, Heidegger gives preliminary notice of being concerned not with the instrumentalist and anthropologic definition which represents technology as a kind of human activity serving ends established by man, but with the more fundamental task of discovering the transcendental conditions that make possible the experience of beings as raw material available for manipulation, exploitation and consumption[38]. In his view, the essence of modern technology neither is to be identified with the arrangement of techniques, devises, and production systems that make up the most tangible mark of contemporary industrial society, nor is to be associated to the rationalist and scientific world view that embraces the historical epoch of modernity. Both these elements, industrialism and modernist world view, are in fact epiphenomenal manifestations of a deeper movement that takes place on the ontological level of Being's epoch shaping play. Modern technology is to be understood instead as a mode of disclosing things, an original revelation that exposes things as entities liable of not only being scientifically investigated and brought together under a unique system of laws, but also engineered and utilized.

Heidegger explains that the expression *technology* stems from the Greek word *techne* which originally means "the act of bringing forth". It refers to both the activity of the craftsman and the fine arts whose essence lies not in the process of making, manipulating or using means, but in revealing. As denoting an act of revealing, the word *techne* is associated to other similar words like *aletheia, poiesis* or *physis*, all expressions that mean "bringing forth", "bringing into appearance". Now, according to Heidegger, the revealing

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[38] On Heidegger's transcendentalism see M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, Indiana University Press, 1990, Introduction; plus D. Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity*, cit., pp. 172-177. The latter argues that Heidegger's philosophical enterprise can be legitimately called *transcendental*, even though the methods he employs for establishing his claims are more phenomenological than those attainable in a traditional transcendental deduction.

that rules in modern technology is a sort of one-dimensional disclosure of things as standing reserve:

> The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which *sets* upon nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or peaceful use.[39]

The phenomenon of setting upon is, Heidegger continues, a challenging forth and 'happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew. Unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing.[40]'

The expression Heidegger uses to name the content of the original revelation that constitutes the essence of modern technology is *Gestell*. Ethimologically, the German word *Gestell* is made up of the root *stell*, which means *to put* or *to set*, and the prefix *ge*, which generally serves to confer upon the expression in which it appears the semantic nuance of collectivity[41]. Hence, *Gestell,* as the call on man to encounter beings as standing reserve, can be translated into English by the expression "universal imposition"[42].

According to Heidegger, the world of universal imposition has taken over in late modernity Descartes's world based upon the dominance of subjectivity and established a regime of competition among men for the conquest and exploitation of the earth:

> Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing reserve... Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object[43].

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[39] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, cit., pp. 14-15.

[40] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid. p. 16.

[41] Cf. D. Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity*, cit., p. 145.

[42] The expression "imposition" emphasizes that beings are under the sway of the call of Being while "universal" tries to capture the semantic nuance of the prefix *ge*, indicating that all beings, man included, are involved in the call and are under the threat of being objectified.

[43] Cf. M. Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology", cit., p. 17.

The point made here by Heidegger needs clarification. To summarize: Heidegger describes technology as a mode of revealing of beings as standing reserve. He identifies revelation with the opening up of Being which manifests itself in the form of a call sent out to man to order beings as raw material available for use and manipulation. This call assumes the character of a "universal imposition" whose commands cannot be eluded. Under its dominion every object in the world is made available for the subject, but the subject itself has now lost the central role that it played when it emerged in the early modernity as the ground of beings and has instead been reduced to open availability.

The weakening of the role of subjectivity in modern technology implies that there is a transition within modernity from an earlier stage characterized by the domination of subjectivity to a later one dominated by universal imposition. In the latter, the central subject has been removed from the privileged position in the ontological order and brought to the same level as the other worldly things as an objectified entity.

Yet, Heidegger maintains that the development of modernity in the sense of the dominion of universal imposition represents a fulfilment of its intrinsic nature. The replacement of the centrality of subjectivity with the generalized will to power of universal imposition goes in fact along with the unfolding of modern technology. At the culmination of modernity everything is ordered to stand by and be immediately ready for manipulation. Things are no longer experienced simply as objects that stand over against the subject in order to be certified as to what their ontological status is, but have been transformed into mere standing reserve available for human engineering.

Now, if man is no longer the projecting centre of a methodical and rigorous procedure that stamps the mark of reality upon those things that conform to his predelineated patterns, what kind of role has he been relegated to? Heidegger claims that in the world of universal imposition every entity, man included, is made object of a call or an "attack" that urges them to stand ready for use and exploitation. The source of this attack placed upon beings lies nowhere because there is no primordial font out of which a calling force could radiate[44]. Heidegger says therefore that this attack which is waged upon man in the form of a call ordering indiscriminate exploitation of the energies of nature takes on the feature of a "challenging revealing" that opens up a field of possibilities

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[44] Cf. D. Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity*, cit., p. 147.

in which things and man are made available to one another. However, despite there is no centre from which the call for availability and ordering is emitted because man himself has been claimed by the same call to come to presence as standing reserve, man still plays a special role as the receptive abode that makes the world of universal imposition possible:

> Who accomplishes the challenging setting-upon through which what we call the real is revealed as standing reserve? Obviously, man. To what extent is man capable of such a revealing? Man can indeed conceive, fashion, and carry through this or that in one way or other. But man does not have control over unconcealment itself... [However], because man is challenged more originally than are the energies of nature, i.e., into the process of ordering, he never is transformed into mere standing reserve. Since man drives technology forward, he takes part in ordering as a way of revealing. But the unconcealment within which ordering unfolds is never a human handwork.[45]

Man occupies a halfway position between the call of unconcealment and the process of ordering, but he has no say in the work of modern technology. Or, at least, modern technology as an ordering revealing is no merely human doing. Thus, rather than an instrument in the hands of self-determining man designed to serve his purposes, it turns out to be a world of its own whose logic and necessity surpasses the limits of human control. As a consequence man, in accomplishing the attack on things by ordering them as standing reserve, simply responds to the call of unconcealment without having any control over unconcealment itself. It is universal imposition, which as the essence of technology is nothing technological but a mode of revealing, that in ultimate analysis holds sway of the modern world.

Heidegger asserts also that the order for universal imposition is sent to man by destining. As such, it holds complete sway over him, even though it happens in and through him. Yet, the destining of universal imposition does not compel. It is not a fate that manifests itself in the form of a command directed to the human will. On the contrary, man, as being-in-the-world, always already belongs to the realm of destining by listening to it without being involved in any sort of constriction:

> When we consider the essence of technology, we experience *Gestell* as a destining of revealing. In this way we are already sojourning within the open space of destining, a destining that in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or, what comes to the same thing, to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil. Quite to the contrary, when we once open ourselves expressly to the

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[45] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", cit., p. 18.

essence of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim.[46]

How is it possible that man, who is caught up in the frame of destining, becomes free? How can he achieve complete freedom if he is always claimed by the destining of revealing? In order to reconcile freedom and destining Heidegger resorts to the paradox of identifying both.

The conundrum implicit in this seemingly ethical paradox, however, can be disentangled on the ontological level if we bring into the discussion Heidegger's theoretical issue of what it means for man to be in the world. I have already mentioned that, according to Heidegger, the subject-object dichotomy is not the primary way in which human understanding of reality occurs. He claims that the encounter with things happens first on a more fundamental level than that which is described by the modern oppositions between subject and object or thing and qualities. Human being, he contends, is first of all *Dasein*, the "being there of", whose essential ontological constitution is to be a "being-in-the-world"[47]. As being-in-the-world, *Dasein* is always already involved in the world and dealing with some being or other, before concepts and propositions structure the meaning of its encounter with it. In other terms, the encounter with the world happens first on the primordial level of our dwelling in the world. It is out of this pre-conceptual understanding that we erect our conceptual frameworks and form explicit propositions that articulate and make explicit the meaning that has already been experienced on the pre-linguistic level.

On the other hand, as one terminus of a dual ontological structure named "being-in-the-world", world is not a mere collection of objects detached from the subject and at disposal of its manipulative operations. On the contrary, world is a texture of things and lived possibilities that are not present as such, but emanate from present objects as the horizon within which we comprehend practically the things we are confronted with by relating them to projected purposes. Therefore, while significance emerges out of the play of presence, absence and possibilities taking place within the texture of the world, the world exists only as the presupposed context that makes possible the occurrence of meaning. Consequently, it can never be articulated in a definite set of propositions.

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[46] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., pp. 25-26.

[47] The hyphens in the expression "being-in-the-world" are designed to point out the unitary structure of the kind of being that *Dasein* is and to remove any misleading suggestion that the entity referred to by the grammatical term "subject" is something that is "opposed to" or "stands against" the entity referred to by the grammatical term "complement".

However, despite the indeterminacy of its boundaries, the openness of the world is not unlimited. The closure of death, as the possibility that ends possibilities, determines an existential and qualitative limitation that constrains the world to a certain definite temporal structures.

Heidegger believes that, inasmuch as we postulate pure openness to things, we delude ourselves. The ideal of unlimited access to the world is the legacy of a metaphysical way of thinking that emphasizes presence over the temporal dimensions of past and future. The world, instead, is irretrievably finite. Thrown into it, we find ourselves confronted with a series of possibilities that have been passed on to us from past experiences and uncompleted achievements. Then, on the basis of what has been revealed and granted us, we project actual possibilities into the future. Ultimately, it is in this interstice between what we have been granted to be and the activity of uncovering from the past unthought possibilities that can be projected into the future that the creation of human freedom is played.

I now return to the question of the essence of technology. Heidegger claims that the world of universal imposition is the latest manifestation of Being in the history of productionist metaphysics that began with the Greeks. As a further development of modernity characterized by the dominance of subjectivity, the technological era was prefigured at the very beginning when "to be" came to mean "to be produced"[48]. Yet, productionist metaphysics is the history of one specific meaning of Being, that is Being as *energeia*, that stands alongside other meanings like *aletheia* and *hypokeimenon* but exhibits a development of its own. Therefore, while subjectivity is the logical outcome of the transformations of *hypokeimenon* into *subiectum* and *aletheia* into *certainty*, the world of universal imposition results from the history of the transformation of *energeia* into the world of the will to power.

It is Plato, according to Heidegger, the proto technological thinker *par excellence*, given that he first gave impulse to the history of productionist metaphysics with his doctrine of the *eida* as the eternal forms of which sensible things are imperfect copies. Heidegger contends that Plato drew the notion of *eidos* from the sphere of human manufacturing where models and blueprints were used as prototypical images for the making of the work. Like the shape of an accomplished product of a craftsman was

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[48] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, cit., Introduction.

founded upon the structure of a model, thus Plato thought that the aspect of the changeable things in the temporal-empirical world was founded upon the structure of the eternal forms in the ideal and temporal world. Hence, by interpreting Being in the sense of the permanent presence of eternal forms rather than as the event of presencing itself, Plato initiated the history of metaphysics.

Aristotle, Heidegger continues, turned further away from the understanding of Being in terms of disclosure and revelation, thus deepening the process of metaphysics, with his interpretation of the Being of a being in terms of *energeia*, that is the event by which an entity endures in presence.

The Roman translation of *energeia* into *actualitas* introduces another shift in the meaning of Being. Now, the Being of an entity is understood as that which "causes" the existence of the entity, so that the entity ends up to be the effect of a cause. Afterwards, in the ontotheological Christian thought, God becomes the supreme causal agent, a planning and calculating Creator who makes things come into and last in presence.

With the inauguration of modernity announced by Descartes, subjectivity takes over God as the producer of all things. Then, the transformation of the meaning of the Being of a being from objectivity - to stand over against - into value accounts for the transition from Descartes to Nietzsche. It is Leibnitz, however, that paves the way for Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power. In his doctrine of the individual monads, he understands beings as products of human will more than objects of a mere representing subject. Also Hegel describes will as the inner force of history through which reason attains absolute self-knowledge. Nietzsche, however, performs the last extreme act of the history of productionist metaphysics by making reason an instrument in the hands of the will to power. In his theory, reason comes to serve the purposes of the will, which are nothing but its self-perpetuating striving for ever more power. The culmination of subjectivism into the will to power marks the triumph of modern technology. The Overman emerges as "the technological worker-solder" who uncovers the "value" of all entities in their availability to stand as material reservoir 'necessary to enhance the ultimately aimless quest for power for its own sake'[49].

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[49] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, ibid., p. 173. I also owe to Zimmerman this account of the history of productionist metaphysics. Cf. ibid., pp. 168-173.

Nietzsche's theory of the will to power brings to a conclusion the history of productionist metaphysics. Since his nihilism has exhausted all the possibilities of the destiny that was sent out to humanity in the age of the Greeks, whatever follows will be from a new beginning. Will it be man the agent who carries out the task of taking himself out of the history of metaphysics and initiating a new era? No, "only a God can save us" from the world of universal imposition, Heidegger states in his *Spiegel* interview. Any sort of human effort, philosophy included, 'will not be able to effect any direct transformation of the present state of the world.[50]'

Two reasons are to be adduced in order to account for man's impotence: first, according to Heidegger, the age of universal imposition has reached a point of completeness that makes it impossible the emergence of further possibilities from within its own resources. Secondly, the levelling out of all subjects in the general availability of things to be ordered - this being an accomplishment of the world of universal imposition - has neutralized the existence of any ultimate ground from which the appeal to impose a new order on the world could proceed.

Nevertheless, in spite of being totally dependent upon the uncontrollable power of technology, Heidegger foresees a limited role for man in preparing the conditions for a new manifestation of God, that is for the coming into presence of a new mode of revelation alternative to that of universal imposition. He believes that the essence of technology is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might have affected the essence of man to such an extent to deny him the possibility of entering a new revelation. On the other hand, it harbours in itself a "granting" which 'lets man endure that he may be the one who is needed and used for the safekeeping of the coming to presence of truth.' Quoting Hoelderlin, Heidegger emphasizes that where the danger is, grows the saving power too. Should the saving power actually be arising somewhere, man's keeping awake the readiness for the expectation would turn out not to be futile.

But, how does the saving power materialize within the world dominated by universal imposition? Heidegger says that the saving power comes into being in letting man 'see and enter the dignity of his essence', a dignity that lies in 'keeping watch over the unconcealment of all coming to presence on this earth.' In other terms, the age of universal

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[50] Cf. the article "Only A God Can Save Us: An Interview with Martin Heidegger", in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. VI, No. 1, 1977, p. 18.

imposition opens a way for us to get out as it offers us a chance to take a "step back" from the one-dimensional experience of beings as standing reserve and encounter the event of disclosure in its own right. This retreat from the world of universal imposition will therefore enable us to catch a glimpse of the original phenomenon of presencing where the transcendental conditions for the possibility of the occurrence of the succession of epochs in history are contained.

To have the destiny of universal imposition as such before us, without being screened by the mediation of any metaphysical scheme, is for Heidegger an experience liberating in itself, since we come to realize that we inhabit the world on a level other than that of the things made simply present. Moreover, by realizing that the destiny of universal imposition holds sway of the technological world, we come also to grasp the untenability of the categories of modern thought. The concepts of ground and foundation, cause and effect, all will turn out to be inadequate to describe the relation of mutual dependence between the essence of technology and the concrete phenomenon of technology, a relation which is not that of an Idea that hovers over its existential occurrences, but is to be understood in terms of granting and destiny, absence and presence, possibilities and obliviousness. As a consequence, all the metaphysical categories will be *aufgehoben* in the Hegelian sense, 'that is they will remain but lose their unconditioned power.'[51]

What we truly experience in taking the step back from the world of universal imposition is a prelude to what Heidegger calls *Ereignis*, that is the event of the belonging together of man and the world. We can become aware of the appropriation of man and things because we already have a pre-conceptual understanding of it. We always already know the way things are revealed and how they take on meaning within the texture of the world. We know all this because we do not first stand in the world by devising concepts and theories in our isolated monads and projecting them outside into the external reality, but by being involved practically in its significant unfolding based upon the interplay of presence, absence, and time.

The belonging together of man and the phenomenon of unconcealment of beings has been forgotten throughout the Western tradition because it is appropriate to the nature of the latter to withdraw and refuse itself. Metaphysics, we have seen above, covers up both

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[51] Cf. the article "Only a God Can Save Us: An Interview with Martin Heidegger", ibid.; plus D. Kolb, *The Critique of pure Modernity*, cit., pp. 156-57.

the unconcealment of Being and its own concealment of this unconcealment. Now, at the end of modernity characterized by the dominance of universal imposition, this double hiddeness for the first time since the early stages of the Greek thought can become visible again. As the technological world is disclosed in its overall meaninglessness, we come to realize that it is driven aimlessly forward by the call to universal imposition, and that this call is nothing but the condition of our historical world that withdraws perennially and can never be brought into luminous transparency.

Insofar as we grasp the appropriation of man and things within the space opened up by the revelation of Being, we gain access to an experience of finitude that speaks of the intrinsic limitations of our historical situation. We come to understand, in other words, that we exist as mortal beings thrown into the world who are not engaged in the task of knowing and manipulating alien objects by means of scientific discoveries and technical progress, but are involved in finite projects of carrying out possibilities that we retrieve from what in the past has been left unthought. Within the destiny that we receive and are called to bear forward, we discover that we and the objects surrounding us belong together, that there is no harshness in the objects which needs to be overcome, and that this reciprocal appropriation urges us to embrace the facticity of our historical situation in which we do not possess unlimited possibilities. By doing so, we give up envisaging final and ultimate landing-places that are attained at the end of ceaseless journeys across history and come to accept the inescapable necessity of sojourning within limited horizons. In there, time is not reckoned in a linear sequence by the pointers of our watches, but flows in accordance with the phenomenological movement of our inner consciousness.

However, the fulfilment of the step back from the world of universal imposition and the decision to embark on the task of thinking as a preparation for the advent of a new revelation do not make by themselves the new era arrive. In *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger seems to deny that there is any logical necessity or causal connection between our dwelling away from the world of universal imposition and the actual event of its overcoming. The making of the succession of epochs in history is exclusive prerogative of the inscrutable play of Being, and man has no say in it. Thinking can only bring him to this awareness.

Compared to the previous epochs in the Western history of metaphysics, there is something special about our age, and it is that we are at the end of a long path. The destiny of the metaphysical history of Being is about to be played out. Within the cleared

'Western' space allowed by the concealment of its self-withdrawing, all possibilities have been exhausted. There will be no further turning into a new metaphysical era. What comes next, if it comes, will be of a different quality.

Instead of blindly attacking technology and attempting to neutralize the dominion that it has imposed on the world by devising rational patterns of historical development leading to the advent of the new era, Heidegger invites us to become aware of the inescapable truth that there is no exit from the technological world. Technology cannot be mastered or overcome because it is the destiny that was sent to humanity by the play of Being. Yet, man can prepare the way beyond the technological era through a reflective thinking on a different kind of making and producing that discloses things in a non-domineering fashion. This meditative activity involves the undertaking of an act of deconstructing the history of productionist metaphysics designed to unearth what has remained unthought throughout its unfolding. Following the traces left behind by the metaphysical manifestations of Being, Heidegger discovers the primordial and authentic meaning of technology in what the ancient Greeks meant by *techne*: to disclose things and let them be. Of course, this uncovering does not by itself initiate a new mode of producing, but can help to restore an understanding of technology that has been forgotten by humanity and give an insight into the way in which a future possible advent of Being prefigures the encounter of man with things.

At the conclusion of his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger says that reflection on technology must take place in the realm of art because, on the one hand, art is akin to the essence of technology, while, on the other hand, is fundamentally different from it. The privileged position that art occupies in the technological order makes it the object of a special attention on the part of the philosopher who is èager to discover an abode harbouring adequate resources to foster the growth of the saving power.

The inner connection between art and technology resides, for Heidegger, in the fact that both are forms of *techne*, that is modes of disclosing and knowing. However, Heidegger recognizes that this definition is at odds with the common interpretation which identifies in the form-matter structure the essential constitution of every entity, from mere things such as stones to pieces of equipment like a pair of shoes or useless objects like a van Gogh's painting. It is generally assumed as an incontestable truism, he emphasizes, that things consist fundamentally of formed matter, in the sense that they are produced by

adding a particular form to a prior shapeless material[52]. Yet, he intends to reverse this constricted interpretation by uncovering an authentic understanding of the process of making and producing which abstains from instrumental and anthropologic misconceptions.

With his doctrine of the four causes, Aristotle introduced in the metaphysical tradition what has now become the ordinary conception of making as a causal activity. He stated that every entity is the resultant of the concurrence of 1) the material cause, that is the matter out of which, for example, a silver chalice is made; 2) the formal cause, that is the shape into which the material is carved; the final cause, that is the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice is produced; 4) the efficient cause, that is, for example, the silversmith who makes the chalice by moulding the material according to the formal cause.

Heidegger denies, however, that Aristotle conceived of "causality" in a productive sense, a sense that it assumes when it is taken to signify "bringing about" or "effecting". He contends that the Greek expression for "causa" is "aition", which means "that to which something else is indebted". Thus, the chalice is indebted both to the silver, for the material of which it is made, and to the *eidos*, for that which gives it shape. Furthermore, it is indebted to the *telos*, for that which defines the boundaries within which it is used, for example, the sacrificial ceremonies in the Olympic temple. Finally, the chalice is indebted to the silversmith, for the "how" of the coming into appearance of the matter, the *telos* and the *eidos*. The substantial change in this version of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes concerns the role of the silversmith. He no longer comes out as the efficient cause, that is the agent who brings about the finished chalice as if it were the effect of a making, but as the one who is responsible of "gathering together" the other three ways of "being indebted". The matter, the *eidos*, the *telos*, and the silversmith now turn out to be "occasionings" more than "causes", all co-responsible of "bringing forward" the chalice into appearance. Among them, however, the silversmith shares the highest proportion of co-responsibility, for, thanks to his special attunement to *logos*, gathers together the other moments into the unity or synthesis of the finished chalice.[53]

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[52] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, cit., pp. 149-187, p. 157.

[53] For this understanding of the way in which Heidegger reads Aristotle's notion of causality, cf. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confraontation with Modernity*, cit., pp. 232-233.

In this light, if understood in terms of *techne*, authentic producing does not involve the causal intervention of an agent who, by means of his manufacturing and intellectual skills, forces the material together into a specific form, thus effecting the finished product. Rather, it is the event of bringing something into the open for its own sake, so that it can be released from hiddeness and allowed to come forth as something accessible in its own right. Of course, the know-how required to gather the thing into a stable presence presupposes the capacity of the silversmith to disclose in advance what the envisioned product is.

Nevertheless, according to Heidegger, handcrafts and equipments possess the ontological power of disclosing entities only in a derivative sense. In fact, they arise from art, which is the highest form of *techne*, and bring things forth exclusively within the world opened up by the work of art. Heidegger explains the world-founding power of art by analysing the event of truth occurring in a well-known van Gogh's painting featuring the shoes of a peasant woman. As long as we imagine a pair of shoes in general, he argues, we do not need any special knowledge any special knowledge to figure them out. Nor we acquire more information than we already have once we have produced a description of the content of our imagination. We all know what a pair of shoes is. A pair of shoes is a pair of shoes. They consist of leather soles and uppers, joined together by thread and nails. They serve to clothe the feet and protect them while walking, working in the field or dancing. A pair of peasant shoes, too, is a pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet, Heidegger claims referring to the peasant shoes appearing in van Gogh's painting:

> from the dark openings of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the fieldpath as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplained worry as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth,* and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.[54]

It is only in a work of art, like van Gogh's painting, that we discern the very essence of a

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[54] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", in M. Heidegger (ed.), *Basic Writings*, cit., p. 163.

pair of shoes. The real peasant woman, instead, simply wears them. She is well aware of the world which her painted shoes speak of, but in a pre-conceptual and unreflective way. Indeed, the more the world evoked by the shoes in the picture keeps quiet unnoticed in the background and refrains from intruding into her everyday life, the better the (real) shoes do their job. The peasant woman walks in them and goes to work with them, but she never looks at or thinks about them. The shoes speak of themselves exclusively in the painting. There they emerge into the unconcealment of their Being. They do so because the painting, as a work of art, is the event revealing what they are "in truth". Art succeeds to bring the shoes forth as they are because it possesses the ontologically disclosing power of carrying us away from the affairs of the world in which we are constantly engaged into the event of the opening up of the world as such.

This revealing, this truth of beings happens only in the work of art. Therefore, although the activity of creating art and that of producing equipmental things are manifestations of the same essence, *techne*, they are fundamentally different, given that the artist opens up the world while the artisan reveals the things within and in accordance with the structure of the world already opened up and founded by the artist. Yet, both are modes of disclosing, a trait that exposes, in Heidegger's view, the inadequacy of the dominant metaphysical concepts to grasp the essence of things. To be sure, this disclosing characteristic is shared also by natural things. Indeed, *physis* (nature) is revealing in the highest sense, for it accomplishes its power of "bringing forth" without the need of any sort of mediation. *Physis* is the arising of something from out of itself, like, for example, the bursting of a blossom into bloom. Whereas the revelations happening in the case of a painted pair of shoes in van Gogh's painting or of the silver chalice in Aristotle's description of the notion of causality occur only by virtue of the artist and the silversmith, a blossom emerges from out of itself as if it produced itself. It combines both the disclosing and generative capacity.

Nonetheless, although *physis* is self-generating, it does not come into light outside of the historical world opened up by the work of art. For example, it is only the temple standing on the rocky ground of a valley in Greece that makes its surroundings significant. A storm raging above it would be meaningless if the temple did not enable it to manifest itself in its violence. Similarly, only the temple, not the sun, brings to radiance the splendour and gleam of the stone of which it is made. And it is the temple firm towering

that makes visible the invisible space of air[55]. Heidegger calls the 'where' of the provenance from which everything arises, included the stones of the temple, *earth* and claims that art is the locus where the eternal opposition between earth and historical world is played:

> World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth and earth juts through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-open it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.[56]

Only a work of art lets the earth be earth. In it, for the first time, metals come to glitter and shimmer, colours to glow, tones to sing, the word to say. By virtue of a work of art, the stone and the blossom, originally worldless, come to have a world. Yet, on the other hand, the earth struggles to resist against art's attempts to bring into the open its own elements. Thus, as long as it does not utterly succeed in its concealing and sheltering action, we have a plurality of works of art being produced as well as sequences of historical worlds being brought into appearance. Therefore, the coming into light of a work of art indicates that a breaking through earth's defences has occurred, but it suggests at the same time that more and more is yet to be gained from its inexhaustible source.

In conclusion, the point that Heidegger is trying to make with his examination of the phenomena of art's creating, equipment's producing and *physis*' self-emergence can be summarized in the following way: all these phenomena are modes of disclosing, but truth, as the revealing of beings in the highest sense, occurs essentially in a work of art where the ontological play of lighting and concealing takes on the features of a strife between earth and world. In the equipment, instead, the disclosing property does not become prominent because it disappears in usefulness. In this respect, equipment is radically different from works of art and natural things[57]. It is a commodity that serves human purposes. It appears within the world already opened up by a work of art and fulfils practical needs which are defined by the system of significant references constituting the horizon of the world. By way of contrast, works of art, as world-founding, stand on the edge of the world, not within

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[55] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 169.
[56] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 172.
[57] M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, cit., p. 234.

it. In this sense, they make no "practical contribution" to the world[58]. They are useless. And useless are natural things, too. They fulfill no purpose, neither in the world nor outside, in the service of a supposed transcendent principle. There is no reason for their being: they are because they are. A rose blooms because it blooms. That is all[59].

Now, also a piece of equipment, by virtue of its essence as *techne*, an essence which it shares with works of art and natural things, is without reason and *essentially* useless. It has no function but to disclose and reveal the world. Yet, it cannot do properly "its job" - that is, to disclose the world - because it is too busy "in" the world. A long history of misunderstandings and misconceptions has covered up and even distorted its essence, so that it can no longer be fully expressed. The history of productionist metaphysics tells precisely the story of how man in Western civilization has filled the fundamental meaninglessness of things with an abstract apparatus of concepts, categories and purposes. On the other hand, man could not escape from setting up this story. The unspeakable and ineffable purposelessness of the sheer presencing of things was too a terrifying spectacle to be endured. The history of productionist metaphysics has therefore given a "reason" and a "purpose" to an otherwise a-rational and purposeless world, thus enabling man to be released from his anxiety.

The modern technological system is merely the latest and final development of this history. Grounded in the essence of *techne* as disclosure for the sake of disclosure, it is utterly purposeless, despite the apparent purposiveness that governs its unfolding. The purposelessness of technology is visible both in its content, which reveals the aimless striving of an unrelenting will to power for ever more power, and in its form, in which it is exhibited as just another world among many others. In this perspective, talk of technology as an instrument in the hands of man serving his purposes is pure nonsense. Technology exists in a world of its own, indeed it is the world that is available for us and is beyond our control.

Ultimately, the step back from the world of universal imposition that Heidegger urges us to take does not aim to establish by itself a new post-technological and thus post-modern era, as if man were in charge of the destiny of the world and could "produce " such

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[58] The fact that in the current global market works of art are traded and made travelling from one exhibition to another does not affect, according to Heidegger, their essence, which is to open up a world and reveal its truth. Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", cit., p. 150.

[59] Cf., M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity,* cit., p. 135.

an era. Rather, to retreat from the world of modern technology means to give up the constant purposiveness it demands and, by engaging ourselves in a meditative thinking in the vicinity of Being, enter the realm of what is purposeless. There we could discover, Heidegger envisages, the artistic character of modern technology, that is 'we could discover that the technological world is analogous to a work of art in the sense of being a disclosure of entities simply for the sake of that disclosure, not for any "higher" or "ulterior" purpose[60].'

Once modern technology has been unmasked in its absolute contingency and unveiled as having no rational or theological justification for its existence, we come to realize that 'things could be otherwise.'[61] This prompts us to attune ourselves to the possible arrival of a new revelation of Being so as to be prepared to take on ourselves the new destiny it may send us. While thinking and meditating, Heidegger foresees however that we will continue to produce and consume, to manipulate things and to pursue objects, but all these activities will lose their unconditional power upon our will. We will no longer let ourselves be overwhelmed by the frenziness of technology. Awaken and illuminated, we will be waiting patiently for the advent of the new "God" who alone can save us.

V. Animal Rationale versus *Homo Humanus:* A Dialectical Reversal?

Before moving on to the next question I intend to raise in this chapter, a recapitulation of the main line of the argument that I have developed so far is needed. I began with the claim that, in Heidegger's view, the advent of modernity marks the triumph of subjectivity as the ground of all beings. However, as Heidegger's "secularization thesis" about the emergence of modernity seemed to suggest, whereas the discovery of the universe of self-consciousness frees man from the theocentric structure of the Christian thought, simultaneously the affirmation of subjectivity above nature opens up a gap between man and the world. The world appears as something opposed to the subject who, in turn, feels insecure and not at home. Nevertheless, man overcomes his alienation by carrying out a project of objectification and mastery of the world. The world is transformed into a world picture, that is a scientific model whose formal structure reflects the corresponding structure in the representing activity of the subject. This process of objectification and

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[60] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, ibid., p. 235.
[61] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, ibid., p. 236.

control of nature evolves into modern technology whose essence is identified by Heidegger in the call of Being to universal imposition. In other terms, modern technology emerges in Heidegger's analysis as the call of a destiny that was sent out by the inscrutable play of Being to urge man and things to appear as standing reserve for ordering and disposition. Heidegger argues also that the history of the West as a whole is a destiny and that, within the sequence of its epochs characterized by the dominion of productionist metaphysics, modern technology is simply the logical outcome. There is therefore a kind of necessity in its appearance which makes impossible for it to be overcome by mere human doing. Yet, Heidegger believes that man, by meditating on the essence of universal imposition, can uncover a different meaning of technology liable to suggest a picture of the new beginning.

At this point, however, Heidegger's "quasi-eschatological" vision of a humanity liberated from the grips of technology raises the question of the ethical import lurking behind his ontological speculation. The inescapable question is: in what sense and to what extent is the type of post-technological man Heidegger envisages essentially superior to the present man shaped by metaphysics and humanism? Besides, what implications will Heidegger's thinking in the proximity of Being have on the values which have been cherished by humanity up to now?

Heidegger's hope for the advent of a new kind of humanity is motivated by his deep unsatisfaction with the man who has emerged at the end of modernity, namely the clever animal who pretends to be in control of the world but is in fact the unaware recipient of a call of destiny that urges him to strive unrelentlessly for more and more power for its own sake. Although the man whom Heidegger depicts as the prevailing type under the dominion of industrial technology carries many traits of Nietzsche's last man, he believes that it is the Overman, that is the type of man envisioned by Nietzsche as the radical alternative to the feeble and decadent last man, that represents the grandest and most advanced sublimation of the ideal of man demanded by technology. If the last man embodies in fact the bourgeois standards of happiness and security and indulges on the comforts of life which are offered by technological progress, Heidegger contends that the Overman reinforces this tendency as long as he represents the fulfilment of the hubristic aspiration of modernity for the mastery of the earth. Therefore, despite Nietzsche's proclamation that the Overman will overcome nihilism by devising a new table of values in accordance with the principles of the will to power, the actual result of his coming about is a further deepening of it. Having been nurtured within the history of productionist metaphysics, the

Overman becomes the "half-steel, half-organic human machine"[62] which exploits to the last remnants the resources of the earth in order to expand its will to power beyond itself. Following the death of God, he takes on himself the divine power of creating and destroying and, by means of his calculating intelligence, brings the future under the domain of his own will. Hence, Heidegger argues that, if the essence of modern technology requires from man unconditioned submission to the goal of production, then the Overman meets entirely this demand. He is the God-like producer who commits himself fully to the task of arranging domination over the earth on a scale unknown to any previous epoch in the history of humanity.

Of course, behind this highly controversial reading of Nietzsche's idea of the Overman lie two different interpretations of nihilism. While Nietzsche sees nihilism as the history of the devaluing of the highest values, Heidegger conceives of it as the history of the forgetfulness of Being. Accordingly, Nietzsche identifies in the revaluation of the moral values the decisive step which needs to be taken in order to overcome nihilism, while Heidegger envisages that only a new revelation of Being can bring to a conclusion the history of nihilism and initiate a new era. Thus, Nietzsche assigns to the Overman the task of revaluing and determining the new values necessary to open up the post-nihilistic age, Heidegger declares instead to be unable even to anticipate whether there will be a new advent of Being or not, and therefore invites men 'to prepare to be prepared for the manifestation of God, or for the absence of God as things go downhill all the way.'

To put it differently, Nietzsche believes that history, in spite of the innumerable contingencies and dreadful chances disseminated on its way, proceeds in a linear fashion towards the accomplishment of ever more composite human types within ever more complex historical worlds. On his account, the Overman is a superior synthesis, within the evolution of the type *Mensch,* which amalgamates in itself characters and attitudes of both the pre-Christian and the Christian type. Besides, he assumes that the historical epoch the Overman initiates contains both the immediacy of the instinctual behaviour of the blond beast and the complexity of the rational conduct of the mature and disciplined moral man. By contrast, Heidegger considers history as a process of decadence and decline from an original revelation - the primordial appearance of Being to the early Greeks which was experienced by them with wonder and awe - to a subsequent Fall occurring with the fateful

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[62] This quotation from Ernst Juenger is reported by M. E. Zimmerman, ibid., p. 187.

first concealment of Being in the metaphysical doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, down to its utter neglect in the conclusive stage of the technological era. In this perspective, the Overman cannot appear to Heidegger's eyes other than as a kind of individual as much entangled in the logic of the productionist metaphysics as the last man. Both are consuming and producing animals blind to Being as such and, therefore, incapable of attuning themselves to the disclosing event from whose play alone the pose-metaphysical era can arise.

Heidegger's interpretation of the Overman would not be affected by the fact that in many of his discourses Zarathustra calls for man to remain faithful to the earth and let things be. Heidegger would reply to such an objection that, regardless of Nietzsche's intentions in putting forward through Zarathustra the doctrine of the eternal return, he has developed the "inner logic" of nihilism at work in Nietzsche's thought[63]. Heidegger contends that, as a countermovement to metaphysics, Nietzsche's project of a revaluation of all moral values does not escapes from the clutches of metaphysics. For him, in order to overcome metaphysics, it is not enough to overturn the suprasensory and metaphysical principles of revaluation of all moral values, as Nietzsche does, and posit the new principle in the sensory and naturalistic will to power. In fact, to think in terms of value-positing is intrinsically metaphysical because metaphysics always necessarily thinks of Being as a value. Therefore, inasmuch as Nietzsche understands nihilism as the inner law of the history of the devaluing of the highest values up to now and explains that devaluing as a revaluing of all values, he remains in the province of nihilism where the process of decadence of values is endlessly perpetuated.

Nietzsche's theories of the will to power and eternal return represent, for Heidegger, the most advanced expression of what it means to think in terms of values. In the theory of the will to power, values are first seen as objects to be brought before the judgemental faculties of the subject for valuation. Once established as values by virtue of their life-enhancing qualities, they are held to be true, thus securing subjectivity in the certainty of itself. The doctrine of the eternal return of the same gives instead an insight into the way in which the will to power, unsatisfied with what it has already obtained, returns incessantly to itself to re-initiate the self-referring movement of expansion of life.

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[63] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead", cit.; plus M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, cit., p. 187.

Heidegger applies to Nietzsche himself Nietzsche's own distinctions between "incomplete nihilism" and "completed nihilism", and regards him as having propounded a doctrine that defers the enactment of the conditions necessary to overcome nihilism. Nietzsche uses the expression "nihilism" in two different sense: one sense refers to the history of the devaluing of the highest values through the gradual realization that the 'ideal world is not and is never to be realized within the real world.' The other sense alludes instead to the act of revaluation of values through which nihilism completes and consummates itself.

Now, Nietzsche claims that, between the definitive collapse of the prior system and the establishment of the new one, a transitional situation comes to prevail in which, on the one hand, it becomes evident that the highest values up to now have lost their guiding force and appear valueless, while, on the other hand, the act of revaluation of all values fails to be performed. The situation corresponding to the positing of new values that follows the act of revaluation is named by Nietzsche "completed nihilism"; the in-between condition in which the world stands valueless is instead what Nietzsche designates by the expression "incomplete nihilism".

Nietzsche holds that, in the void widened by the collapse of the highest values up to now, new ideals settle. Among them, he enumerates the doctrine of progress, with its promise of earthly happiness for the greatest number, socialism and the Wagnerian music. These are however futile attempts, he argues, to escape nihilism without revaluing the former values, and have therefore the effect of delaying the completion of the history of nihilism. The act of revaluation of all values requires instead not only the replacement of the former values with new ones, but also the displacement of the place of God as the metaphysical principle of revaluation.

Since all the ideals in vogue in the phase of incomplete nihilism fail to do away with the transcendent realm as the place of value, Nietzsche asserts that they consequently fail to overcome nihilism. Heidegger contends, in turn, that Nietzsche's Overman fails to overcome nihilism, too. At the climax of his comment on Nietzsche, he claims that, insofar as the Overman pretends to have surpassed the man up to now because he has experienced and accepted the will to power as the Being of all beings, the only aim that he succeeds to accomplish is to disguise himself under the illusion that 'he does think Being in the most exalted manner.' The mere fact of transforming Being into a value binds the Overman indissolubly to the history of metaphysics which is essentially nihilistic. Nietzsche

obliterates the access to an authentic experience of Being, according to Heidegger, by stamping Being with the mark of a value. In his teaching of the Overman, Being as such becomes something superfluous and its truth remains therefore unthought.

In this perspective, the Overman is nothing but one of those ideals pullulating in the state of incomplete nihilism to fill in the spiritual void widened by the loss of God. Yet, there is another, completely different side of Heidegger's reading of the Overman. This is hidden in the folds of his oracular discourse about the mystery of Being. At the conclusion of his essay *The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead*, he claims that 'in the age of the completion and consummation of nihilism which is beginning Nietzsche experienced some characteristics of nihilism but never recognized the essence of it.'[64] Then he goes on to affirm that, in Western history, Being has remained unthought not because of an error or a neglect of the question concerning Being, but because Being withdraws. As a consequence, obliviousness to Being is not the fault of man, but of Being itself. The inference that one is justified in drawing from this seemingly innocuous reflection in which the Overman and the withdrawal of Being are linked together, is that the Overman, rather than representing one more futile ideal set up by the man up to now in the face of the dissolving of the supreme values, is actually the destiny sent out by Being to enable man to pass over into another history no longer marked by metaphysics. In other terms, the Overman turns out to be the man who appears at the culmination of the history of metaphysics with the mandate *to push forward* to its extreme logical consequences the technological world, so as to prepare the conditions necessary for a new advent of Being which could determine a turning in the history of humanity. Zimmerman helps to capture this unspoken side of Heidegger's thought:

> For Heidegger, the Overman is demanded by the final stage of the history of metaphysics. If humanity did not allow itself to be stamped by modern technology, that history could not be brought to a completion and a new beginning would not be possible. In light of Heidegger's claim that the "saving power" arises only within the "growing danger", we might say that the emergence of the Nietzschean-Juengerian Overman is in and of itself a harbinger of the longed-for new world, despite the fact that the Overman is simultaneously the culmination of the nihilism which constitutes the "inner logic" of Western history.[65]

Zimmerman emphasizes the ambiguity intrinsic in the figure of the Overman. He claims

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[64] Cf. M. Heidegger, "The World of Nietzsche: God is Dead", in *The Question Concerning Technology*, cit., p. 109.

[65] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, cit., p. 188.

that the Overman, as the technological man, is Janus-faced: he could become the harbinger of the new era, but he could also perpetuate endlessly the nihilistic forgetfulness of Being. This dialectical interpretation of the figure of the Overman, however, is further reinforced by Gadamer's Hegelian reading of Heidegger's philosophy of history. Gadamer's writing is extremely dense and it is worth therefore quoting one passage of his confrontation between Hegel and Heidegger in full:

> Of course Heidegger never speaks of an historical necessity anything like the one which Hegel claims as the basis of his construing of world history as reason in history. For Heidegger history is not a past which has been suffered through to a point where the present itself is encountered in the totality of what it has been. In his later works Heidegger quite intentionally avoids the expressions, history and historicity, which since Hegel have dominated reflection upon the "end of metaphysics" and which we associate with the problem of historical relativism. Instead, he speaks of "fate" and "our being fated" as if to underscore the fact that here it is not a matter of possibilities of human existence which we ourselves seize upon - not a matter of historical consciousness and self-consciousness. Rather, it is a matter of what it is allotted to man and by which he is so very much determined that all self-determination and self-consciousness remains subordinate. Heidegger does not claim that in his philosophical thinking about history he grasps the necessity in the course which history takes. Nevertheless, in conceiving of metaphysical thought as a history unified by the forgetfulness of Being which pervades it and in seeing the radicalization of this forgetfulness behind the age of technology, he is attributing a kind of inner consequentiality to history. To go even further, if metaphysics is understood as forgetfulness of Being or obliviousness to it and the history of metaphysics up to the point of its dissolution, as growing forgetfulness of Being, then of necessity, it is the lot of the thinking which thinks this, that what has been forgotten comes to mind again. And, in fact, it is made evident by certain of Heidegger's phrases, e.g., "presumably, all of a sudden", that there is even a connection between increasing forgetfulness of Being and the expectation of this coming or epiphany of Being - a connection quite similar to that of a dialectical reversal.
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> In the exposure to the indeterminacy of the future which arrests all human self-projection, Heidegger finds traces of a kind of historical self-justification: the radical deepening of forgetfulness of Being in the age of technology justifies the eschatological expectation in thought of a turnabout which will make visible that which actually is, behind all that produces and reproduces.
>
> One must allow that such an historical self-consciousness as this is no less all-inclusive than Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute.[66]

Gadamer contends that Heidegger's return to the question of Being is not itself a beginning, but is made possible by an end. So, the arising of metaphysics, its deepening across the centuries and its final exhaustion are historical steps which mediate the step Heidegger takes when he turns his attention to meditative thinking in the vicinity of Being. In this perspective, the "step back" which he urges us to effect is not a logical leap 'in the sense of a vaulting out of the medium and context of metaphysical thought', but is

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[66] Cf. H. G. Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 109-110.

originated by the working out of all possibilities in the history of metaphysics. Since there cannot be history without continuity, Gadamer argues, the historical justification for the turning into the post-metaphysical era must be contained in the metaphysical one. This way of proceeding in which a position is pushed to the point of self-contradiction so as to make possible the transition to a higher truth is precisely what Hegel meant by dialectics. Can Heidegger's thinking be inscribed within a pattern of dialectical thought where truth emerges as the result of the process that led to it? Is it possible to associate a philosophy based upon the temporality and finitude of human existence to a form of movement which, by contrast, postulates totality and self-referentiality?

Gadamer argues that Heidegger proceeds in a Hegelian fashion, despite his innumerable attempts to demarcate his own thought from Hegel's. He maintains that his history of metaphysics is articulated in the form of a series of "sendings" of a destiny that determines both the present and the future. Gadamer also believes that an inner necessity can be discerned in the history of metaphysics as the history of obliviousness to Being in which the progression of one misconception of Being after another moves head-on toward its most radical consequences. Finally, Gadamer points out how, according to Heidegger, the primordial revelation of Being to the early Greeks continues to influence even the present technological world, so as a link is established between origins and end which makes it possible to see them within a single process, as antipodes of a unique whole.

It could be added to these analogies, in order to support the parallelism between Hegel's and Heidegger's accounts of Western history, the fact that Heidegger conceives of the mutual involvement of man and Being as a kind of movement marked by difference and negativity. Man is deemed by Heidegger as the receptive abode for the appearance of Being, but Being, in giving itself out into the open space, simultaneously withdraws into the dark and the shadow. Yet, although Gadamer's reading of Heidegger's account of the history of metaphysics is substantially correct, it needs to be qualified. In entering Hegel's territory, one is immediately caught within a system of thought spelling the philosophical vocabulary of self-closure, self-transparency and self-presence. Well, it must be said that the dialectical tensions arising within the historical epochs described by Heidegger as stamped with the mark of metaphysics do not lead to full self-understanding. For Heidegger, we cannot see what the overcoming of technology and universal imposition, assuming that it will one day occur, will bring about. The end of modernity fulfils the long history of metaphysics, but that history is only one turn in the directionless play of Being.

Heidegger believes that a radical finitude and deep obscurity underlie the human situation in the historical world and no rationality, not even Hegel's interplay of the dialectical oppositions in which both form and content are involved, can account for its mystery.

However, the dialectical necessity that Gadamer discerns in Heidegger's version of Western history concerns merely the succession of epochs within it. Taken as a whole, Gadamer would probably recognize that the occurrence of Western history as well as its connection with other possible new beginnings is a matter of pure chance which has to do with the errant wanderings of Being. Yet, this fundamental contingency taking place on the grounding level of the arising of traditions does not rule out the possibility that each tradition, specifically the Western tradition, contains in its beginning tensions and contradictions that lead to later developments and changes. Indeed, Heidegger believes that from within the possibilities we are granted by the disclosure of Being, we can retrieve and renew what has been left unthought. Those critics, like Kolb, who deny dialectical movement in Heidegger's account of Western history assume erroneously that Heidegger gives no explanation of the arising of differences of content between the epochs. Kolb claims that the particular quality of each different epoch, for example, the medieval as distinct from the modern, remains unaccounted in Heidegger and must be accepted as a destiny. As a consequence, we have to take what is granted to us as something immediate and unified, 'not something that can be caught in a dialectic that exploits inner tensions and multiplicity'. To sustain his argument, Kolb points out how all the historical epochs that emerge from Heidegger's account of Western history are, in a certain sense, levelled out because their differences disappear into the Greek beginning which stands so dominant over what comes later that there is no further space for inner mirroring and mediation.

This analysis is not correct, though. Although there is in Heidegger no systematic account of the process of Western history as a whole in the shape of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, his writings are disseminated with disparate and nearly comprehensive explanations. If we consider, for instance, his account of the movement within modernity, from the earlier stage characterized by Descartes's affirmation of subjectivity to the later one dominated by technology and universal imposition, we can discern a gradual process in which inner contradictions arise and demand to be overcome. The transition from Descartes's *ego cogito* to Nietzsche's will to power, Heidegger explains, is mediated by Leibnitz, Kant and the German idealists. When Descartes's *ego cogito* turns out to be too formal and abstract, Leibnitz is called to introduce in it, with his

doctrine of the individual monads, appetite, desire and will[67]. Kant subsequently finds himself in the necessity of having to determine transcendental laws in order to regulate the activities of understanding and will. He attempts, at least to a certain extent, to contain the latter within the domain of the former, but Nietzsche, who comes to bring to a conclusion the whole process, shows how the will, once liberated from its transcendent chains, does not admit any limits, even those which are self-imposed.[68]

This brief story, though abrupt, should be sufficient to claim the untenability of Kolb's position and maintain Gadamer's dialectical hypothesis which accounts for the role that Heidegger invokes the Overman to play in order to take man out of modernity. Now it is time I confronted the question which I raised at the beginning of this section, namely the question of the sense in which the alternative conception of humanity that Heidegger develops should be regarded as superior to the existing humanity reared within the humanistic tradition.

I have already pointed out that the long decline Heidegger denounces humanity has undergone in the course of Western history is not of biological but metaphysical character. He emphasizes how humanity has been shaped across the centuries according to a system of moral, spiritual and cultural values deeply rooted in a metaphysical and naturalistic conception of human nature which has significantly distorted its true essence. The humanistic tradition, Heidegger maintains, rests firmly upon an interpretation of the essence of man as *animale rationale*. In that tradition, man is taken fundamentally as an aggregate of animal organs, instincts and drives upon which a structure of rational attributes is predicated. Heidegger contends that this conception of man is substantially metaphysical, and hence nihilistic, because it fails to take into account the fact that man exists in the world as a temporalizing being standing in the lighting of Being. Man is much more than mere *animalitas*, he claims, and is also essentially other than an animal organism to which a soul has been attached from outside to infuse life into it. For Heidegger, the essence of man lies in his ek-sistence, that is in an "ecstatic" inherence in the truth of Being

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[67] I am aware that this "deconstructive evaluation of Descartes's thought is partly inappropriate, but it seems to be Heidegger's belief that Descartes's notion of subjectivity lacks of the content of will. Or, more likely, Heidegger knows the articulation of Descartes position, but he simplifies it consciously, a fault which is inevitable in any sort of deconstructive thinking.

[68] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, cit.

in which he continuously makes the present by projecting himself toward the future out of what has been handed to him from the past[69].

Heidegger, however, rejects the accusation of promoting the "inhuman" as a consequence of rejecting humanism[70]. Rather, he counterattacks by claiming that it is in truth the naturalistic conception of the essence of man in humanism that does not recognize man's authentic dignity:

> Humanism does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough... The essential worth of man does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the Subject among them, so that as the tyrant of Being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly bruited "objectivity". Man is rather "thrown" from Being itself into the truth of Being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of Being, in order that beings might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are. Man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the lighting of Being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being. But for man it is ever a question of finding what is fitting in his essence which corresponds to such destiny; for in accord with this destiny man as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of Being. Man is the shepherd of Being.[71]

Humanism, by retaining man in a state of forgetfulness of Being, stifles his transcendent nature and relegates him to the dispersion of the everyday affairs in the world of beings. There man, deprived of what is most his own, the care of Being, is condemned homeless to stumble aimlessly about. Thus, he sets out to wage a relentless struggle for power, while his logical instruments of calculation give him the illusion of being in control of the entire planet. Culture, science, art, religion, all that which man estimates worth cherishing become mere objects of value that gain the highest ontological status in the order of beings only by virtue of a subjective assessment. Therefore, subjected to the vagaries of man's judging and doing, they are not let be what they truly are, vanishing inexorably into the anonymity of mere, though valid, things.

With his denunciation of humanism, Heidegger aims to restore the humanity of what he calls *homo humanus*. He believes that a new, "higher" type of man, that is *homo humanus*, would arise if the present man abandoned the region of *homo animalis* and set off on a new path of thinking closer to the abode of Being. However, were man actually make the decision of embracing the realm of thinking and dwelling in the proximity of

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[69] For a full understanding of Heidegger's notion of "temporal ecstasies", cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division Two, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, pp. 370-381.
[70] Cf. M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", cit., p. 210.
[71] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid.

Being, no theoretical or practical consequences would, for Heidegger, result out of it. Nor would such a decision be susceptible of ethical judgement, either. In Heidegger's view, thinking and dwelling in the truth of Being simply fulfil the essence of man. We should bear in mind, however, that to scatter ourselves in the realm of beings or to devote our intellectual capacities to scientific knowledge and philosophy are perfectly legitimate forms of fulfilling our human essence too, though in the mode of inauthenticity. From an ontological viewpoint, there is nothing wrong with that. Yet, Heidegger thinks that more essential than fabricating rules and laws for a rational conduct is for man to find his way to his abode in the nearness of Being, because there he can eventually experience something he can hold on to, in his jargon, 'a protective heed that offers hold for all conduct.'[72]

In spite of the eschatological hopes that Heidegger attaches to it, the path of thinking he traces appears to be arduous to follow. It involves a confrontation with nothingness, with anxiety and with the thought of death. It demands man to repudiate the present, prosperous and secure life he enjoys in the context of a progressive society and to adventure into a spiritual territory from which all promises of material well-being have been banned. In brief, it asks man to peer through the optimistic veil covering the inevitability of technology and human progress and grasp its fundamental purposelessness and necessitylessness. This glimpse into the ungrounded grounds of technology will not open up a horizon of absolute freedom where everything is permitted, though. A new kind of necessity will emerge in which man comes to recognize that his own death is inevitable and that its inevitability determines the limits of what can be done.

Given Heidegger's remark that the recognition of human finitude implies a step back from the unlimited striving of the humanistic subjectivity, the question arises again of whether the transition from the inauthentic, humanistic mode of revelation of man's essence to the authentic, post-humanistic one is necessary or depends upon the unpredictable play of Being. Does *homo humanus* emerge as a logical result of the development of the clever animal or is the ontological gap between these two types *a priori* not reducible to a matter of historical necessity?

Taking into account Heidegger's assumption that history is a manifestation of the play of Being, it would seem plausible to regard the question of the destiny of man as an

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[72] Cf. M. Heidegger, ibid., p. 239.

exclusive prerogative of the mystery of Being. Yet, Being is for Heidegger a historical necessity. It necessitates by defining the horizon within which man is thrown. The thesis I have propounded in this chapter is that the necessity to which the Heideggerean history of Western man is subjected is articulated in dialectical terms. This means that the completion of the stages of forgetfulness of Being that constitute the history of productionist metaphysics makes at the same time possible the arising of the new post-metaphysical era. In this perspective, I believe *homo humanus* represents the teleological fulfilment of the historical process initiated by the Greeks, a belief that amounts to the claim that the historical occurrence of *homo humanus* was already contemplated at the very beginning.

What characterizes Heidegger's position, however, is a peculiar eschatological import which it carries with it. *Homo humanus* does not emerge at the conclusion of a positive progression, as the mature actualization of possibilities that are gradually brought to completion, but appears at the end of a process of negative fulfilment out of a Hegelian operation of dialectical reversal. The manner in which the Heideggerean man makes his way through history is strikingly similar to the Christian narrative of the accomplishment of spiritual perfection through painful and lacrimatory descent into the obscurity of fleshly sin[73]. For Heidegger, *homo humanus* appears at the dawn of a new beginning after having undergone a long decline of homelessness and alienation away from his abode in the nearness of Being. His task is to redeem man from his fall into the blindness of the clever animal whose humanistic training has denied him the accomplishment of his authentic possibility: to disclose things and to shelter their Being. This task involves three interrelated moments: first, a destruction of all values and standards of metaphysics through a hermeneutical digging out of the unthought sediments of the human possibilities which are deposited underneath the crystallised shapes - Middle Ages, Renaissance, Modernity, for example - constituting the history of productionist metaphysics. At the end of this reinterpretative enquiry, metaphysics transpires as the history of nihilism which leads, via dialectical reversal, to the disclosing as well as self-withdrawing event of Being. Secondly, it implies man's dwelling in the proximity of Being, waiting for a new revelation

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[73] The enormous influence of the Scholastic on Heidegger's manner of questioning and posing philosophical problems is indicated by Heidegger himself in a letter to Karl Loewith dated 1921. There he writes: 'Do not measure me by the standards of any creative philosopher... I am a Christian theologian.' This quotation is reported by G. Steiner, *Heidegger*, London, 1992, XVI.

to arise. Such a state of attendance is made necessary by the fact that the turning away from the purposelessness of the technological world does not generate by itself the new post-technological world, but simply prepares the conditions for it to be established. In this transitional stage, all our logical categories and moral conceptions are suspended and we come to recognize the finitude of our existence and set limits on the range of possibilities which are open to us. Finally, it demands us to attune ourselves to the happening of Being in order to discern the signs that indicate the direction we must follow.

However a dangerous exit lurks behind Heidegger's outline of man's path to purification. Its cathartic significance seems to exempt those who undertake it from raising questions about the ethical implications descending from his overall project. *Homo humanus* is not merely superior to *animale rationale*. He is rather beyond good and evil. He fulfils teleologically the essence of man at the culmination of a long process made of falls, deviations and misconceptions. The *Via Crucis* of these historical digressions he is forced into is however not of moral but ontological nature. There is no suggestion in Heidegger that clear and distinct knowledge of what is good, i.e. dwelling in the vicinity of Being, springs out of deep descent into evil, i.e. inhabiting the world in a state of obliviousness to Being. Were it the case, it would be possible to attach a moral value to the whole process. Instead, why man must go astray from the path of Being to retrieve it later is something we do not know. The reason lies in the mystery of Being. From this viewpoint, the history of Being Heidegger sketches is more reminiscent of the Greek tragedy than the Christian allegory of salvation. At bottom, the true player of the whole is the inscrutable destiny. Here is how Zimmerman explains this point in a highly illuminating way:

> Heidegger's account of the history of Being, and of humanity relation to it, reads in places like a Greek tragedy, in which the protagonist - Western man - acts as if he were gifted with self-understanding and self-mastery, but in fact possesses neither. The hero turns out to be a victim of hubris, having wrongly assumed that he knew who he was and that his own intentions were the origins of his acts. Western man's blindness, however, is not self-inflicted but fated: the Being of entities conceals itself to such an extent that Western man can no longer understand who he is or what other entities are. Happening "behind the backs" of historical humanity, the self-concealment of Being tends to turn humanity into players in an ontological game. In tracing out the history of Being, Heidegger sought to discover the character of this play. Such dis covering was an act of *anamnesis*, i.e. the remembering of what had been concealed and thus forgotten.[74]

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[74] Cf. M. E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, cit., p. 167.

While the Christian metaphor of the trajectory of salvation from an original state of innocence to final redemption via Fall into sin helps to render the digressions of the Heideggerean man in history, it must be said, though, that it is misleading insofar as it conveys on them a moral significance. In this respect, the narrative structure of Greek tragedy helps in a greater measure to capture the exclusively ontological relevance of the historical development of the Western man Heidegger intends to account for. Yet, despite all the conceptual expedients we set out to devise to qualify Heidegger's thought, it is rather difficult for him to avoid the question of the moral implications descending from his overall project. He dismisses the accusation of advocating the "inhuman" by speaking against humanism or of appealing to irrationalism and the arbitrariness of drives and feelings by speaking against logic[75], but he does not provide persuasive reasons to ensure that the breakdown of logic and rationality following man's dwelling in the vicinity of Being will not end up in an unrestrained eruption of destructive nonsense. As Gillespie points out, 'having abandoned the categorical reason of metaphysics for something approaching a pure intuitionism... man is liable to fall prey to the most subterranean forces in his soul or at least is in danger of mistaking the subrational for the superrational.' Besides, he continues, man's openness to the truth of Being not only 'finds it difficult to distinguish between that which rises above and that which falls below reason, but is also unable to distinguish between good and evil and indeed tacitly admits that both are present in every revelation of Being.[76]'

Yet, what I have argued for in this chapter suggests that Heidegger's failure to account for the moral implications of his thinking reflects a more fundamental failure which is of logical nature. As I explained above, Heidegger employs dialectical instruments in order to provide a historical justification for the necessity of overcoming modernity. He believes that Western history is a history of decline, but the account he offers of it leads, via dialectical reversal, to a final redemption. He claims that the modern technological age dominated by universal imposition is a prelude to a post-technological one in which man ends his long journey of digressions and deviations from the path of Being and returns home, an abode in the proximity of Being. Nevertheless, the exhaustion of the logical possibilities of technology in which culminates the entire history of

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[75] Cf. M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", cit., p. 225.
[76] Cf. M. A. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, cit., p. 174.

metaphysics since Plato *falls short* of a full establishment of the new era. Heidegger urges man to take a step back from the technological world in the belief that disclosure of the necessitylessness and purposelessness on which it rests would follow, thus revealing the more fundamental necessitylessness of Being. But, having taken the step back and attuned his thinking to the happening of Being, man must wait for the new revelation to be unveiled. Thinking, Heidegger claims, can make man become aware of the purposelessness of technology and prepare him to be prepared for the arrival or absence of God, but no more can be asked of it.

Tracing Heidegger's line of thought, one draws the conclusion that he has penetrated deep into the mind of God and seen what He is storing for man, but he himself is not God and thus cannot make things happen. Therefore, the logical gap between the potentialities liberated by the exhaustion of Western history and their effective actualization is filled by mysticism. This conceptual chasm raises the question of the consistency of Heidegger's philosophy. The question is not whether the technological era is the last word in the history of the West or a prelude to a post-technological era, but whether Heidegger's account of the history of Western humanity is plausible or arbitrary. The fact that he resorts to a semi-mystical form of a-logical thinking after having made large use of the most sophisticated expedients of dialectical methodology suggests that there must be something wrong with his account of Western civilization as well as, by hermeneutical implication, according to Heidegger's own standards of hermeneutical interpretation, with his ends. Given that Heidegger seems to have gone far enough into the depths of Being and become privy to a great deal of its secrets, the inference that one is led to derive from the mystical clouds surrounding the advent of the post-metaphysical era is that he does not provide sufficient historical justification for its actualization. In other terms, the new era Heidegger envisages is not a possibility contemplated in our tradition. Arrived at the culmination of the technological world, a logical leap in the form of a step back or suspension of the rational categories of thought is required not because our tradition has worked out all its possibilities, but because the possibilities that Heidegger has allegedly rediscovered from what has been left unthought in Western history are utterly arbitrary and do not belong to its actual development. There is no evidence, for instance, to justify inscribing the classical and medieval worlds in the history of the forgetfulness of Being and not in that of the forgetfulness of subjectivity. Why should Descartes's subjectivistic turn be seen as a hubristic form of self-affirmation and not as man's finally coming home after a long

journey across alien (and authoritarian) worlds? Is it not the old positivist story, echoed by Blumenberg, more plausible that important discoveries in science in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries prompted man to break free from the divine order of the universe and reconsider his role in it than a sacerdotal narration of epiphanies which describes the emergence of modernity and subjectivity as the coming into light of something that was already there but in a different form? Is not modern subjectivity, as Hegel explained, a tormented and suffered achievement in the history of humanity which brought about freedom, liberation and emancipation rather than the further deepening of an original mistake? Insofar as these questions remain unanswered, Heidegger's dialectical account of Western history appears to be, in Hegel's terms, more a dialectic of the abstract than a dialectic of the concrete.

VI. Conclusion

At the conclusion of the last chapter, I raised the question of whether Heidegger, in spite of his devastating critique of the ideology of progress, shares with Nietzsche the deeper dialectical structure lying at the core of that concept. The answer offered in this chapter is positive, but with an important amendment. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger too detects a continuity in the history of the West from the earlier stages of the forgetfulness of Being in the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle to the later development in nihilism. Yet, nihilism is for him the end of modernity and we do not know the way out, provided that there is any. At this point history is complete and a new beginning is needed. By contrast, Nietzsche's standpoint is not fatalistic. He envisages an exit from the age of nihilism to be carried out by synthetisizing in a new, more advanced human type the achievements that man has attained during his historical past.

However, the great importance of Heidegger is to have shifted the debate on progress towards the question of technology. His major philosophical accomplishment consists in having shown that the growth of man's potentiality to control natural processes is not in itself progress. Rather, the transformations that the age of technology has generated are such that they undermine at its very roots the potential of humanization of our world upon which the heirs of the Enlightenment relied.

The philosophers of Critical Marxism, with whom I will deal in the last two chapters, have not exorcised Nietzsche and Heidegger but have incorporated the potential of their thought within their own reflection. Yet, there is one thing which even a critic of progress like Adorno cannot put into question: that is, the idea that the development of human capacity of domination of nature, while not being by itself true progress, is however the fundamental condition of its possibility. Allegiance to this idea sets apart the two critiques of progress - the 'nihilistic' and the 'utoüpian' - and marks the suspicion of Critical Theory towards those expressions of a romantic call for a return to nature which resonate in certain passages of *Zarathustra* or in the most conspicuosly mystical declinations of Heidegger's writings.

Critical Theory's reception of the Enlightenment tradition was^mediated by Max Weber. Before examining in depth the philosophical reflection of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse on the themes relevant for this thesis, I turn briefly my attention in the next chapter to the great German sociologist and to his interpretation of modernity as a process of progressive rationalization of the world.

6

THE CHECKMATE OF REASON

Max Weber's Account of the Western Path of Rationalization

I. Introduction

In a fashion which strongly reverberates with Nietzsche's study of the genealogy of morals, Max Weber draws a picture of the modern world in which its distinctive features of scientific and technological development as well as bureaucratic organization of society are understood to be the result of a historical process of rationalization and intellectualization. He devises a developmental framework, bordering on the lines of a philosophy of history, within which the secular modern world appears to emerge out of the successive stages of magic and religion. In his view, magic characterizes the earliest forms of behaviour in the history of humanity. He holds that in primitive societies, by virtue of a process of abstraction, spirits are believed to conceal behind natural objects, artifacts, animals or the person of the magician and endow them with special power. This power is used to manipulate worldly forces in order to achieve practical ends:

> Since it is assumed that behind real things and events there is something else, distinctive and spiritual, of which real events are only the symptoms or indeed the symbols, an effort must be done to influence, not the concrete things, but the spiritual powers that express themselves through concrete things. This is done through actions that address themselves to a spirit or soul, hence done by instrumentalities that "mean" something, i.e., symbols. Thereafter, naturalism may be swept away by a flood of symbolic actions.[1]

The displacement of naturalism, Max Weber emphasizes, depends upon the success with which the magicians use their charismatic power to fabricate in the followers the belief in a causal connection between magical forces and economic and social life. As long as the manipulation of these extraordinary forces generates a following which believes in their effectiveness to provide the social community with material welfare and protection from evil spirits, the dominion of magical symbolism is legitimated.

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[1] Cf. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Methuen, London, 1965, p. 7.

The transition from the age of belief in spirits and demons to the age of monotheism and world-religions occurs through a process of rationalization which favours the primacy of universal gods.[2] In India, Iran and Babylon, Max Weber argues, a relationship is increasingly established between 'the rational regularity of the stars in their heavenly courses' and the earthly domain. As both dimensions, the terrestrial and the celestial, are conceived of as being regulated by a common divine order, norms and practices of the social community are progressively made to conform the systematized sacred demands of a class of priests.

But it is especially in Israel that for Max Weber there evolves an approach to universalistic monotheism of world-historical significance. There, a covenant is forged between Yahweh, a god of independent existence who governs both the natural and historical events, and the Israelites by which the Israelites promise loyalty to Yahweh in return for Yahweh's promise to grant them dominion over Canaan after the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Of course, in constituting the covenant, the Israelites accept to conform their actions to Yahweh's commandments and be sanctioned in case of violation. However, Weber contends that, as historical reality contradicts the divine promises, Yahweh tends to lose the characteristics of a warrior lord who presides over the destiny of a local community and takes on the universal traits of a transcendent and inscrutable God of world redemption and world history. As a result, the conception of God is spiritualised and religious behaviour is increasingly rationalized.

The growing recognition of a transcendent God who cannot be reached by means of magical devices undermines the original calculating rationalism which instrumentally resorts to religious behaviour for the purely external advantages of everyday economic success.[3] Pursuit of the sacred becomes more and more 'irrationalised' while the other-worldly goal of salvation takes over the practical concern for happiness and welfare in this world. According to Max Weber, this process of adjustment of metaphysical views, along with the systematization of a religious ethics carried out by a professionally trained class of priests, develops up to the modern age when the magical and religious understandings of the world are displaced by the growth of scientific and objective knowledge.

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[2] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 22.

[3] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 27.

Science, with its all-encompassing explanations about the origin of the world and the causes of its events, relegates belief-systems to a marginal role, thus bringing about a condition of disenchantment of the world. As irrational forces are banished from the sphere of intellectual life and replaced by the assumption that reality is ultimately known by means of mathematical calculation, transcendent values are eliminated from the domain of political and economic life while individual conduct is re-oriented towards the pursuit of immediate everyday needs. The world comes therefore to be de-sacralized and the vacuum opened up by the retreat of other-worldly meanings into the realm of private conviction is filled with the creation of 'the technique of establishing the most efficient way to achieve a given end.'[4] This makes up what Max Weber labels the world of formal and instrumental rationality, a world in which the procedures of means-ends calculability pervade all forms of social life and confer upon it the hallmark of a systematic and organized whole.

This chapter is designed to be introductory to the following chapters on Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. Therefore, I will not deal in depth with the themes which arise in it.

II. The Path of Rationalization: Max Weber on Ancient Judaism

Weber ascribes to the establishment in ancient Israel of an ethical monotheism free of all magic the value of a process of universal historical significance. In particular, he identifies in Deuteronomy, the free prophets from Amos to Jeremiah, and the Book of Job the inaugural texts of Western rationalism. The essential features that these sources reveal as breaking points of the age of magic can be summed up in 1) a new conception of God, 2) the affirmation of a rational and systematic religious ethic, and 3) the institutionalization of the sacred in a hieratic structure.[5]

In truth, the departure from magical beliefs in ancient Israel did not occur at once, but resulted from the transition from the pre-state and pre-prophetic times, when the religiosity of the peasants was still predominant, to the prophetic and pre-exilic period, dominated by urban culture.[6]

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[4] Cf. R. Schroeder, *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture*, Sage, London, 1992, p. 13.

[5] Cf. W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination*, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 167-68.

[6] On Weber's periodization of the history of ancient Judaism, cf. W. Schluchter, ibid., p. 169.

It was the constant sense of threat which the Israelites felt in the face of the merciless conquerors surrounding them and the traumatic collective experiences of the Egyptian bondage and of the Babylonian-Persian exile that for Weber set them on the path of searching meaning and salvation in religious behaviour. This feeling of uncertainty and instability reflected on their conception of God, too. Yahweh emerged first as a creator of suprahuman power, driven in his actions by arbitrariness, passion and wrath rather than wisdom and goodness. From his residence atop the mountains, he established a covenant with the Israelites whereby he committed himself to guarantee protection to the political confederacy of the Israelite tribes in return for the loyalty of his chosen people. But later, the ancient Israelites's voluntary submission to an alien and supramundane being named Yahweh shifted the idea of God from a celestial and physical sense to an immaterial and metaphysical one. In the face of the perfection of the divine order, the world as it was began to appear to the Israelites meaningless and worthy of rejection. World-oriented behaviour was therefore increasingly replaced by a world-denying attitude which identified in God the provider of the meaning of the course of history. As a consequence, a demand advanced that, in order for the world to become a meaningful totality, it had to be shaped according to the designs of its creator. In other terms, since the world was believed to have a systematic and coherent meaning provided by God, the conviction spread that the conduct of mankind should be oriented according to this meaning, for only in relation to it life could obtain a unified and significant pattern.[7]

This process of systematization of all manifestations of life was carried out in the pre-exilic times by teaching prophets and teaching priests. Weber sees in Deuteronomy an expression of this breakthrough towards standardization of human conduct. Deuteronomy is a document containing ethical commandments as well as ritual and socio-political prescriptions. Given the characteristics of its content, Weber infers that it must have been written by religiously motivated intellectual elites. It betrays in fact an intellectualistic conception of God. Yahweh is no longer seen as the lord of a local confederacy who acts arbitrarily, but his actions are now described to be rational and to conform to a plan.

Behind this conceptual transformation of the notion of God lies a shift in the centre of gravity of the social and political life from the countryside, inhabited by masses of peasants and shepherds, to the city, populated by the nobles and the plebs. However, the

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[7] Cf., Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, cit., p. 59.

urban plebeian strata were not appealed by the Levitic Torah teachers, but by the prophets of doom. According to Weber, from 900 to 600 BC, that is from the division of the Kingdom to the Persian-Babylonian exile, a religious conflict went on between teaching priests and prophets. These clashes turned out to be extremely fruitful to the intellectual culture of Palestine, since they brought the demand to make sense of growing political threats to a higher level of interpretation. The pre-exilic prophets of doom were in fact capable of transcending the primarily legal ethic of the Torah in the direction of an ethic of conviction.[8] By reinterpreting the old covenant as reflecting an 'original state of purity, they blamed the failure of the believers to meet the demands of God for the present miserable condition. Only by finding the way back to the conduct of life to which the people of Israel had committed themselves when they formed the covenant, the pre-exilic prophets taught, could a future kingdom of salvation be gained. In this way, they succeeded both to restore faith in the covenant and to go beyond the Torah doctrine which descended from it.

Unlike Deuteronomy, written in edifying and charitable spirit, the books of the prophets are scattered with prognostications of an imminent and apocalyptic revolution. They do not simply prescribe commandments, but relate them to a divine will operating within a plan of doom and salvation. As a result, the process of systematization of the religious doctrine is steered away from a purely legalistic exit into an ethics of conviction. From now on, fulfilment of Torah's obligations is not just a ritual duty, but takes the form of a rational task to be performed as part of a messianic eschatology. Religious behaviour begins to point to a theodicy which holds that sooner or later there will arise 'some tremendous hero or god'[9] who will dispense concrete retribution of justices and injustices on the basis of an overall judgement of the conduct of the believer in this world.

In this perspective, God becomes a historicized figure who intervenes in the course of history and is responsive to the ethical achievements of his subjects. According to Schluchter's reading of *Ancient Judaism*, Weber considers the turn in world-view achieved by pre-exilic Israelite prophets towards an ethics of conviction as having far reaching consequences:

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[8] Cf. W. Scluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination*, cit., p. 194.

[9] Cf. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, cit., p. 139.

The development of ancient Israelite religion is seen to have been promoted by pre-exilic Levitic Torah teachers, lay intellectuals, and pre-exilic Torah prophets until it reached a level from which "world-historical consequences" could result: The teaching priests produced anti-magical puritanical Yahwism. The teaching prophets provided it with the quality of an ethic of conviction. As a result, the direction of subsequent ethical development seemed to have been set. A universal religious ethic of conviction of this-worldly activity free of all magic existed within the realm of possibility. This would have marked the transition from sacred law to sacred conviction, from the norm to the principle. For a religious ethic of conviction implies that the value of individual achievements and activities is replaced by "the value of the total personality pattern". It implies further the overstepping of "individual norms in order to bring about a meaningful total relationship of the pattern of life to the goal of religious salvation".[10]

Although ancient Judaism created the conditions for a religious ethic of conviction to set off, Weber discovers that this development did not occur, fundamentally because Judaism lacked of the idea of a direct relationship between God, the deliverer of salvation, and individual consciousness, that is the locus where the conviction of salvation necessary to nurture practical conduct grows. It was necessary, he argues, to wait until the emergence of Protestantism to see the value of the total personality pattern being affirmed.

This erratic course of Weber's developmental history makes his rationalization thesis appear fragmented. As Günther Roth points out, 'Weber modifies the tradition of unilinear progress by viewing socio-cultural evolution as rationalization along various dimensions and directions. At the same time he also rejects the scientific developmental history of his day with its application of historical laws.'[11] For Weber, distinctive factors operate in history within a multi-dimensional structure and come together not as a result of a pre-determined or teleological concatenation, but of an overlapping of alternative paths. The model that he employs in analysing developmental history involves "a dialectics between restrictive conditions and revolutionary breakthroughs". In this sense, ancient Judaism represented a special phenomenon within restrictive conditions. Yet, 'forces developing from this starting point succeeded in overcoming these limits and thus triggered revolutionary breakthroughs'. Thus, although the main features of ancient Judaism did not imply continuity or linearity, 'they did point to revolutionary breakthroughs upon which subsequent conditions of development were based, some of which had "world-historical significance".'[12]

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[10] Cf. W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination*, cit., pp. 194-95.

[11] Cf., G. Roth, "Rationalization in Max Weber's Developmental History", in S. Lash and S. Whimster, *Max Weber, Rationality, and Modernity*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987.

[12] Cf. W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination*, cit., p. 190.

In order to explain Weber's apparently irreversible course of rationalization, Weiss draws a parallelism between Weber and Kant. As Kant claims that the future course of history can be predicted only to the extent that men, as rational actors, contribute to its shaping, Weiss asserts that Weber accounts for the dynamic of rationalization by drawing upon 'acting human beings conscious of their freedom of action' who 'confirm their position and their capacity to act within the process of rationalization.'[13] This, Weiss clarifies, is not intended to deny that 'a good part of the rationalization occurs 'behind the back' of social actors and wholly independent of their conscious motivation and decision.'[14] Nevertheless, he claims, such an unconscious element is not decisive and, since men intentionally do not wish a reversal of the process of rationalization on the grounds of their ideas and interests, the course of development flows in an unalterable fashion.

Schluchter argues that Weber identifies in pre-exilic ancient Israelite ethics four developmental alternatives ensuing from several biblical sources. Among these, the Book of Job contains embryonically elements of ascetic Protestantism pointing both towards a conception of God as an absolute, incomprehensible sovereign and towards a doctrine of predestination. However, the Book of Job remained almost completely misunderstood and a new world-view based upon the promise of a future reward in this world for the chosen people prevailed. At the same time, the prophetic and revolutionary spirit faded away and the social structure came to be theocratized. A class of priests took control over the masses and promoted a religious ethics which, though rational and free of magic, was excessively focussed upon the calculative assessment of individual actions according to the prescriptions of the biblical law.

Given the legal turn that Judaism took in post-exilic times, Weber holds that it could not go beyond a rationalism of worldly accommodation. It inevitably failed, he claims, to see the economic realm as a place where the believer could prove his religious stance. Thus, instead of promoting a process of rationalization of this-worldly activity, Judaic religion ended up adjusting itself to the existing social relations.

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[13] Cf. J. Weiss, "On the Irreversibility of Western Rationalization and Max Weber's Alleged Fatalism", in S. Lash and S. Whimster, *Max Weber, Rationality, and Modernity*, cit., pp. 154-163, p. 160.

[14] Cf. J Weiss, ibid., p. 160.

III. Up and Down on the Path of Rationalization: Max Weber on Medieval Christianity and the Protestant Ethic

This incapacity of Judaism to impose a systematic mastery over the world had the effect for Weber of emphasizing the specific character of resentment by which it, as a religion of suffering of a pariah community, had always been marked:

> The factor of resentment thus achieved importance in the Jewish ethical salvation religion, although it had been completely lacking in all magical and caste religions. Resentment is a concomitant of that particular religious ethic of the dispriviliged which, in the sense expounded by Nietzsche in direct inversion of the ancient belief, teaches that the unequal distribution of mundane goods is caused by the sinfulness and the illegality of the privileged, and that sooner or later God's wrath will overtake them. In this theodicy of the dispriviliged, the moralistic quest serves as a device for compensating a conscious or unconscious desire for vengeance. This is connected in its origin with the faith in compensation, since once a religious conception of compensation has arisen, suffering may take on the quality of the religiously meritorious, in view of the belief that it brings in its wake great hopes of future compensation.[15]

This theodicy of misfortune developed into early Christianity and beyond. In continuity with Judaism, early Christian belief carried forward the conception of an eschatological future of redemption for the imperfect and sinful humanity. Yet, it related the possibility of fulfilment of the messianic expectations to unconditional faith in Jesus, an incarnate saviour embodying magical powers within his person. Hence, by making of salvation a matter of inward devotion to the saviour, it gave up the task of reorienting human conduct through obedience to the absolute commands of a transcendent God. Rekindling of the spirit and emotional experience were given priority as opposed to the intellectualistic approach to God predominant among the virtuosi of legalistic scholarship.

Seen from the vantage point of the growth in modernity of Western rationalism, early Christianity seems to represent for Weber a form of regression. In order to obtain salvation, Jesus simply demanded from his followers unlimited submission to the divine power. Worldly affairs and sensuous pleasure remained outside the scope of his concern. Similarly, no ethical condemnation seemed to be attached to the activities of those who engaged themselves in the practice of accumulating wealth or securing luxury. This attitude of ethical indifference to the world slowed down the process of rationalization of the pattern of life. The Christian doctrine did not prescribe a coherent set of ethical commandments whose fulfilment could lead to the establishment of a rigorous and

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[15] Cf. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, cit., pp. 110-111.

methodical conduct. Its instructions pointed only towards brotherly love and charity, two forms of behaviour which sprung more from a feeling of empathy with the other fellow-men within the religious community than from a reflective and deliberative choice.

Later development of Christianity into an organized Church with a clerical hierarchy came to institutionalize the fundamentally magical character of its teaching. Christ's incarnate spirit was renewed through the creation of a corpus of priests and bishops who embodied in their own functional role the miraculous powers of their predecessor. Salvation for the believers came thereby to be deemed to originate not from a consistent and systematic conduct emanating from an inward ethics, but from the performance of a set of sacraments and rites which were assumed to bear, by inexplicable magic, the spirit of the divine. As a consequence, the institution of the Church became the only provider of divine grace while external and formal devotion to its doctrinal authorities ratified the plea for salvation.

As Christianity reinforced throughout the Middle Ages the institutionalization of the religious practice and systematized the doctrine of God in a body of dogmas, it detached itself further and further from the ethical teaching of Judaism. Yet, Weber stresses that in the periphery of the Church's official hierarchy, an ethics of asceticism emerged. New virtuosi of faith appeared who claimed to be the true disciples of Jesus and the real carriers of his ideals. They led a monastic life away from the temptations of the world, judged liable to distracting the pious from a pure dialogue with God. Although they never posed a real threat to the monopoly of the Church on religious authority, they succeeded in promoting a form of life of methodical discipline and constant self-control which later became an important model for the vocational ethics of Puritanism.

Considered as a whole, however, early and medieval Christianity had a regressive impact on the course of Western rationalism. It failed to reorient human conduct according to the demands of a transcendent authority and encouraged an attitude of accommodation to external norms.

The dynamic of rationalization was given instead a new impulse by the emergence in the XVI century of the Protestant world-view. The new idea that the Reformation put forward and changed the whole trajectory of Western history is captured by Weber under the expression 'calling'. Calling was conceived of by Luther as a divine ordinance, a task set by God to be performed in the station of life. What is relevant for Weber with regard to the idea of calling is the fact that it established an evaluation of the moral standard of

the individual according to his capacity of fulfilling the obligations imposed upon him by his position in the world.[16]

Luther rejected the traditional Christian devaluation of worldly activity as a thing of the flesh and rediscovered the value of labour in a calling as the outward expression of brotherly love. Weber argues that Luther offered a moral justification of worldly affairs by reinterpreting the relationship of man and God along the lines defined by the notion of calling. Luther invested the fulfilment of the duties that the divine will had imposed upon the individual of a supreme moral significance. Monastic life was denounced in his teaching as devoid of value since it led the individual to withdraw from his temporal obligations. In contrast, work in the world came to be appreciated by him insofar as it contributed to alleviating the suffering of the most indigent people and to ameliorating the general conditions of the community.

Yet, Luther's conception of calling remained traditionalistic. He did not accept the pursuit of material gain beyond the personal needs. In his perspective, worldly activities were to be confined within the limits of the order of things established by the divine will. In this respect, Weber claims that more far-reaching cultural and historical consequences for the renewal of religious life had to come from Calvinism.

The point of departure of Calvin's theological doctrine is marked by the dogma of predestination. This is derived more from the logical necessity of his thought than from religious experience.[17] He moves in fact from the assumption that God does not exist for men, but men for the sake of God. The only meaning of all creation consists therefore in magnifying the glory of God. An unbridgeable gap separates men from God so that men deserve from him only eternal death unless he has decreed otherwise. Only a small proportion of men, Calvin professes, are elected for salvation, the others are damned. As a result, men's action in the world can play no part in determining their destiny, since it would amount to thinking that men can affect God's absolute and unconditioned decrees.

According to Weber, Calvin's doctrine of predestination had the effect of leaving the single individual in a terrifying state of loneliness. This could no longer turn to the traditional intermediaries and vehicles of the divine - sacraments and rites - in order to attain grace. Thereby, anxiety for his fate and terror of God settled in his soul.

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[16] Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism,* London, 1930, p. 80.

[17] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 102.

Nevertheless, by way of a characteristic dialectical reversal, the Calvinist believer transformed his feeling of self-humiliation before God into a restless and systematic struggle with life.[18] Given that he existed as an instrument of God's will designed to serve his glory, he realized that he could better fulfil God's demands by engaging himself in organizing social life according to God's commandments.

As a result, the Lutheran value of brotherly love came to be seen as a practice of involvement in 'the daily tasks given by the "lex naturae".'[19] And later, Weber argues, it assumed 'a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment. For the wonderfully purposeful organization and arrangement of this cosmos is, according both to the revelation of the Bible and to natural intuition, evidently designed by God to serve the utility of the human race. This makes labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear to promote the glory of God and hence to be willed by Him.'[20]

Weber explains that worldly activity came to be considered among the Calvinists as the only suitable means capable of counteracting the feelings of religious anxiety. When the believer posed the question of how he could be certain of his own election, the answer he accorded to himself was that intense involvement in the affairs of the world could disperse his religious doubts and give him confidence about his state of grace. He saw himself as a mere tool of the divine will and felt thereby prompted to prove his faith by increasing the glory of God through real good works. Indeed, he was aware that the objective results he achieved in his working could not affect God's final judgement, but he assumed that they could be interpreted as a sign of election. Furthermore, although good works were useless as a means of obtaining salvation, he reasoned that they could play an important role in releasing him from his fear of damnation, thus helping him to obtain a condition of systematic self-control.

This pattern of explanation provides Weber with the conceptual tools to claim that the Protestant ethics, especially in its Calvinist version, by changing the believer from within and reshaping the structure of his consciousness, brought the process of

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[18] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 108.

[19] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 109.

[20] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 109.

rationalization of the world which had been initiated by the Judaic prophets to its logical conclusion:

> The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system. There was no place for the very human Catholic cycle of sin, repentance, atonement, release, followed by renewed sin. Nor was there any balance of merit for a life as a whole which could be adjusted by temporal punishments or the Church's means of grace. The moral conduct of the average man was thus deprived of its planless and unsystematic character and subjected to a consistent method for conduct as a whole.[21]

Whereas the Protestant ethic began with a widening of the gap between God and the world and a postulation of a divine calling urging man to perform the duties established for him from eternity by the divine will, it ended up legislating a secular imperative towards the rationalization of the world and, reflexively, of all spheres of human activity. Hence, the idea of fulfilling God's will by carrying out worldly deeds metamorphosed into the secular task of pursuing an efficient and rational organization of the world through impersonal institutions which could facilitate the achievement of the original religious end. Consequently, the believer increasingly lost sight of the transcendent aims of his orientation and loosened the ties with his religious community. The quest for salvation, which originally motivated his involvement in worldly affairs, gave way to the purely utilitarian calculus of economic success, thus bringing to completion the process of secularization of belief.

IV. The Iron Cage of Modern Rationalism

Max Weber having described the process of rationalization as a progressive, though not one-dimensional and unilinear, development from magic and myth into knowledge and science, one would expect him to celebrate in triumphal tones the conquests of modernity. On the contrary, he holds a highly pessimistic view of the conditions of humanity in the disenchanted modern world. At the conclusion of *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, he compares the modern economic order which today appears to be closely bound up with the technical predicament of machine production and bureaucratic organization of society to an iron cage. He portrays this cage as an inescapable condition

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[21] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 117.

of our historical situation. But, at the same time, he does not seem to be able to face up to the reality of modern social life. Goethe's Faust's disillusioned outlook, for whom the realization of intellectualization and rationalization 'meant a renunciation, a departure from an age of full and beautiful humanity, which can no more be repeated in the course of our cultural development than can the flower of the Athenian culture of antiquity',[22] appears to his mind extremely difficult to embrace. The intellectual constructions of science are depicted as a realm of artificial abstraction from which no real life pulsates. The last pages of *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, for instance, are scattered with bleak pronouncements about the fate of the modern world like this:

> No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.[23]

Thus, does Western civilization represent for Weber true progress? If it does not, should it be condemned as a whole? Or should our negative judgement be passed only upon limited segments of its course? And, if the latter is the case, which stages of Western development diverged from the path of progress? Just the latest one? And what is wrong with it?

Weber believes that, under conditions of modernity, science marks the pace and direction of development. He emphasizes also that the origins and role of science in modern life are not accidental, but tightly linked to the pattern of rationalism and disenchantment. He argues that modern natural science emerged out of the Platonic idea of eternal truth and the Renaissance's technique of rational experiment. The Platonic notion of a permanent and unchangeable truth gave impulse to the search for universally valid laws beyond the mutability of everyday opinions, while the technique of rational experiment provided the truths reached at through abstraction with an empirical basis of validation and confirmation.

This methodology of reliably controlling experience informs science of its main features. According to Weber, science is a system of techniques and calculations whereby

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[22] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 181.

[23] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 182.

man masters nature and the world. It has no other meaning but giving answers to theoretical and practical questions about the causes of certain phenomena. However, Weber underlines, every scientific answer raises new questions; 'it *asks* to be surpassed and outdated.'[24] As a result, science has no meaning beyond the purely technical and practical.

In Weber's view, after Nietzsche's devastating criticism of the last man, no one can believe any longer in the naive optimism with which science surrounds its techniques of mastering life as a way to happiness.[25] Quoting Leo Tolstoy, he dismisses the meaninglessness of scientific progress in these terms:

> All his [Leo Tolstoy] broodings increasingly revolved around the problem of whether or not death is a meaningful phenomenon. And his answer was: For civilized man death has no meaning. It has none because the individual life of civilized man placed into an infinite 'progress', according to its own imminent meaning should never come to an end; for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress. And no man who comes to die stands upon the peak which lies in infinity. Abraham, or some peasant of the past, died "old and satiated with life", because he stood in the organic cycle of life; because his life, in terms of its meaning on the eve of its days, had given to him what life had to offer; because for him there remained no puzzles he might wish to solve; and therefore he could have had "enough of life". Whereas civilized man, placed in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge, and problems, may become "tired of life" but not "satiated with life". He catches only the most minute part of what the life of spirit brings forth ever anew, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive, and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very "progressiveness" it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness.[26]

Science cannot reveal the meaning of the world. It is an illusion to believe that science constitutes the way to 'true being' or to 'true nature'. All scientific work is based upon the presupposition of its logic and method as well as of its own existence. Accordingly, the question of whether it is worth having scientific knowledge of the world at all cannot be answered by scientific means.

For Weber, the origins of science are part of the overall process of disenchantment of the world. Scientific techniques and mathematical calculations are, in a certain sense, modern substitutes for magic and spirits. Whereas in ancient times people used to make recourse to mysterious incalculable forces in order to implore the spirits governing the world to satisfy their needs, today all things in the world can be mastered by pure

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[24] Cf. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge, London, 1948, p. 138.

[25] Cf. Max Weber, ibid. p. 143.

[26] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., pp. 139-140.

calculation. However, Weber emphasizes, 'the increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.'[27]

Rather, scientific rationalism has extended its influence upon other spheres of social life. Systematic organization of the labour processes and objective assessment of what are the most efficient means to achieve a given end have become the hallmark of the economic, political, and institutional orders. All the ethical considerations imbuing the religious world-views have vanished. But the abandonment of these demands has opened up a vacuum which has not been filled by the scientific outlook. Science is in principle refractory to any idea of the world as a meaningful totality. Its own attempts aim at devising formal frameworks which reproduce objectively the structure of certain aspects of reality. But science does not purport to answer to the ultimate questions of human life, questions about the sense of death or the meaning of our being in the world; questions of the sort: "What shall we do and how shall we live?".[28] The fact that in the disenchanted world of scientific domination these questions are deemed to be an anachronistic residuum of a distant historical past dominated by magic, illusion, and self-deception does not eliminate 'the human need for a coherent and meaningful world-view.'[29]

Given the narrowness of the causal mechanisms of explanation into which science has forced all systems of belief, Weber seems to deny that the growth of scientific knowledge amounts to real progress. This assertion, however, is not based upon scientific and objective criteria, but stems from the realm of values. Underlying the dominion of science is for Weber an obscure world of 'ultimately possible attitudes towards life' which are endlessly clashing with each other and whose struggle can never be brought to a final reconciliation. To decide which attitude should be predominant is a matter of *interpretation,* not of scientific knowledge. This fundamental aporia about the ultimate values invests the value of the modern world dominated by science, too. There can be no definitive answer to the question of whether the same products of scientific knowledge are worth being known:

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[27] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 139.

[28] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 143.

[29] Cf. R. Schroeder, *Max Weber and The Sociology of Culture*, cit., p. 125.

> Science presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is "worth being known". In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be *interpreted* with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life.[30]

Weber imagines that in the age of modernity, by way of a sort of dialectical reversal, we have been thrown back to the pre-religious world of magic in which a plurality of contending gods and demons competed to impose their predominance. He thinks that we, disenchanted and grown-up people of the age of science, are facing a conflict in our consciousness as to which of these gods should prevail and guide our life:

> We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. Fate, and certainly not "science", holds sway over the gods and their struggles.[31]

This polytheism was dethroned by religious prophecy which promoted a rational and methodical conduct of life. But, Weber continues:

> Today the routines of everyday life challenge religion. Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another. ...Our civilization destines us to realize more clearly these struggles again, after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years - blinded by the allegedly or presumably exclusive orientation towards the grandiose moral fervour of Christian ethics.[32]

It is this fundamental uncertainty about the ultimate values that makes it impossible for Weber to pass a final judgement over the value of modern civilization. Or, to put it differently, our dilemma in assessing the value of modernity is for Weber a reflection of the Kantian yet unresolved dichotomy between the realm of nature, governed by the necessity of the causal explanations of science, and the realm of spirit or religion, whose unbridled revelations generate explanations in terms of the meaning of life. To make our assessment still more problematic is the evidence that the inner logic of religion, at least in its Western Jewish-Christian variation, is a logic of secularization which undermines all forms of religious explanation and forces the ground of the meaning of moral values to

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[30] Cf. Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation*, cit., p. 143.
[31] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 148.
[32] Cf. Max Weber, ibid., p. 149.

retreat into obscurity. The loss of this ground has, of course, implications for the direction of scientific activity. As science is no longer legitimated by the religious and ethical imperative of glorifying God, it becomes meaningless and is increasingly determined by mere material interests. Its norms cease 'to possess a purposive ground and assume an entirely instrumental character.'[33]

The fact that Weber abstains from evaluating the fate of modernity may be taken as an indication that he considers the process of disenchantment of the world as irreversible in the foreseeable future. Whether it is so because instrumental rationality is the telos of history now fully unfolded or because it corresponds to our intellectual aspirations and requirements is left undetermined. To tip the balance towards the teleological hypothesis involves the realization that, once the process of disenchantment of the world has been brought to completion, the enchanted polytheism of the ancient times can be restored only by magic. In other terms, as Nietzsche came to understand throughout the spiritual and existential itinerary of Zarathustra, the overcoming of nihilism - that is, the demise of the old systems of values - and the creation of a new one can be achieved only by irrationally lending our support to a forthcoming prophet capable of rekindling our enthusiasm for new and far-reaching ideals. But how can our historical consciousness relinquish the accomplishment of its own enlightenment and give itself over to the demands of new gods without denying itself?

At this point, it seems that between the Scylla of the iron cage of instrumental rationality and the Charybdis of a rope dance performed by new prophets who invite humanity to physically destroy itself and its memory of the past - an outcome which some commentators believe Nietzsche advocated through Zarathustra - a different alternative is to be sought in order to prevent modern rationality from declining irretrievably into instrumental rationality *tout court* and to revive its original 'religious' and 'ethical' pathos for human emancipation and liberation.

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[33] Cf. D. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, cit., pp. 115-116.

7

THE ANTI-DEMON OF DIALECTIC

Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse on Progress and Human Civilization

I. Introduction

A striking convergence between Weber's thesis of rationalization and the critique of instrumental reason propounded by the tradition of Critical Theory was noted by Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*.[1] Like Weber, Habermas argues, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain that the development of formal and instrumental rationality results from the process of disenchantment of the world whose advent, in turn, Weber traces back to the rationalized worldviews of religion and metaphysics. Ironically, Habermas remarks, both Weber, on the one hand, and Adorno and Horkheimer, on the other, identify the outcome of the stage of disenchantment in a return to a polytheism of idols in which subjective beliefs and convictions come into conflict with each other and surrender the resolution of their struggle to the irrational force of power. Unlike Weber, however, Adorno and Horkheimer hold that the predominance of instrumental reason in the service of self-preservation drives subjective reason to madness, 'for the thought of anything that goes beyond the subjectivity of self-interest is robbed of all rationality.'[2] According to their analysis, in the iron cage of the bureaucratic and administered world the purposive rational actions of the individuals are increasingly detached from the ethically grounded motives underlying the religious methodical conduct of life and rendered mere functional responses to the needs of the socio-economic system.

However, Habermas contends that Adorno and Horkheimer have transformed Weber's rationalization thesis by expanding 'instrumental reason into a category of the world-historical process of civilization as a whole.'[3] On their account, the reification of the world, to use Lukacs's expression, that is the assimilation of social relationships to mere things in the world liable of being manipulated by the subject at his own will, are not

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[1] Cf. Juergen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, vol. I, p. 345.

[2] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 349.

[3] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 366.

modern phenomena, but can be tracked down to the very beginnings of human enlightenment when reason was still blurred with myth. Accordingly, they show that the process of rationalization of the world is not limited to the formalization of certain aspects of social life, but has penetrated deep into consciousness. Thought is put in the service of a logic of domination over nature and human beings, while the ego, which presides over the entire process of subjugation of nature and development of the productive forces, learns to convey these same methods of mastery and repression to his own inner nature.

Habermas argues that from this dialectic of rationalization descends a philosophy of history entangled in an irresoluble paradox. On the one hand, in fact, Adorno and Horkheimer launch their attack against instrumental reason from the viewpoint of a substantive concept of reason which unfolds itself in the form of a universal reconciliation between spirit and nature. On the other hand, however, 'they can only suggest' this more emphatic concept of reason, given that they reject the Hegelian philosophy of totality which rests on the assumption of a unity of the identity and non-identity.[4] Paraphrasing Horkheimer, Habermas claims that 'the dialectic of enlightenment is an ironic affair: It shows the self-critique of reason the way to truth, and at the same time contests the possibility "that at this stage of complete alienation the idea of truth is still accessible".'[5]

Adorno does not want to get out of this philosophical dilemma. He invites us to learn to get along with it and engage in a practice of negative dialectic in which reflective thought exhibits the aporetic nature of the 'concept of the non-identical'[6] without falling in the temptation of closing the series of contradictions into a final identifying reconciliation. However, as long as one wants to catch sight of the harmony of the primordial reason in which spirit and nature were merged together, Adorno suggests that one should resort to the mimetic achievements of the work of art where that unity is given not discursively, but intuitively.

In this chapter, I examine the concept of progress as it is analyzed in the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. I will deal with the philosophical puzzles into which they cast this notion following their critical reception of Max Weber's understandanding of modernity in terms of the affirmation of instrumental rationality. In order to outline the context in which these philosophers locate their theories of human civilization, I begin with a study of one of Horkheimer's middle works, *Eclipse of Reason.* Then, I move on to

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[4] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 382.
[5] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 383.
[6] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 385.

present Adorno's dialectical theory of progress. To be sure, he never articulated one in a systematic way. Nonetheless, I will rely upon a lecture he gave in 1962 devoted entirely to the idea of progress and on other fragmentary remarks on this topic scattered across his writings to sketch a comprehensive framework of his theory. In the following section, I respond to the objections raised by Habermas against Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* I will argue that they fall short of seriously undermining Adorno's and Horkheimer's theory of human civilization provided that this is rescued from regressing into the realm of aesthetics and taken back to the domain of philosophical discourse. In this respect, in the last section I criticize Marcuse's utopian vision of man's liberation as it is exposed in *Eros and Civilization* on the ground that it is based upon a merely biological account of human nature. However, my critique of Marcuse is only provisional. In the following and final chapter, I will present a different view of his theory and embrace his dialectical account of the potential of transformation harboured in technology.

II. Objective versus Subjective Reason: Horkheimer's Reception of Weber's Idea of Instrumental Reason

A paradigmatic account of the philosophical project of Critical Theory can be found in a middle work of Horkheimer entitled *Eclipse of Reason.*This is a revealing text not least because it offers a Weberian diagnosis of the process of rationalization of Western society and juxtaposes to instrumental reason a more emphatic and utopian one. Its starting point is the enunciation of the existence of two forms of reason, both historically developed. Horkheimer names them subjective and objective reason. Subjective reason is concerned with devising the most efficient procedures for the achievement of a given end. Whether this end is valuable in itself or not, though, is a matter that transcends its scope. Simply, the value of the end is assumed by the subject to be self-explanatory and taken for granted. This means that, insofar as a goal is rendered the purposive object of human action, it is presumed to serve the interests of the subject in relation to self-preservation, and therefore is thought to be reasonable. Horkheimer argues that in this process reason is narrowed to the ambit of instrumental reason, that is of a faculty of mechanic calculation emptied of empirical content.

However, he underlines that the concept of reason has not always in the history of Western thought been associated with the utilitarian meaning of a technical instrument

devoted to immediate subjective gains. In Plato and Aristotle as well as in the comprehensive philosophical systems of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, speculative reflection aimed at conforming man's life to the objective structure of the universal order. The world as a whole was conceived of as a harmonious totality within which the place of each being was determined according to rational criteria objectively incorporated in the world itself. As a part of a more comprehensive totality, subjective reason, with its demands for self-interest and self-preservation, was regarded 'as only a partial limited expression of a universal rationality'[7] unfolding in the multiple manifestations of the objective world. Relations between man and nature as well as between men themselves, social and political institutions, and all the instances of the Hegelian objective spirit were thought of inseparably from the idea of the highest good. The task of philosophy was therefore to gain an insight into the nature of the ultimate goals and then to reconcile subjective reason with the prescriptions descending from them. Thus, understood from the perspective of classical and modern philosophy, reason does not refer to the function of coordination of means and ends, but to a form of thinking of what is good in itself and how a happy life can be lived in accordance with the enlightened order of objective reason.

In Horkheimer's view, the subjectivist trend of present day philosophy reflects an incapacity of thought to conceive of objectivity independently of the creative faculties of the subject. But, he admonishes, if man's ultimate decisions are removed from the sphere of rational consideration and relegated to the irrational domain of unaccountable instinctual or intentional forces, reason becomes a functional agency of correlation. The world is increasingly devoid not just of the presence of objective reason, but of any objective content all together:

> In the end, no particular reality can seem reasonable 'per se'; all the basic concepts, emptied of their content, come to be only formal shells. As reason is subjectivized, it also becomes formalized.[8]

As mentioned above, Horkheimer argues that originally, in the philosophies of Socrates and Plato, reason was regarded as a universal insight into the true nature of things. It was conceived of as the eye of mind that could penetrate into the ideas and perceive the eternal order of the world. Reason accounted for what it came to see through a form of dialectical thought which, on the basis of a reflective understanding of ends, could determine beliefs and regulate relations between men.

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[7] Cf. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1974, p. 4.

[8] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 7.

The notion of objective reason rested upon the conviction that reason was essentially contained in reality and that from it derived a specific set of practical obligations. This was an emphatic conception of reason which allowed philosophy to become a suitable substitute for religion and mythology. In fact, as faith in God faded away, methodical and speculative thought emerged as the highest intellectual instrument for bestowing moral meaning upon individual life and rationally organizing political institutions. Therefore, Horkheimer contends, although rationalist philosophy as detached from theology initiated the process of formalization of reason, during the periods of Renaissance and the Enlightenment it still seemed to be able to fulfil the task of providing man with a comprehensive doctrine of theoretical knowledge and moral life without the support of any external spiritual authority.

It is precisely this objective content of reason along with the secularized idea of reason as a medium for penetrating into the true nature of reality that, Horkheimer argues, empiricism has neutralized. Under the devastating criticisms of Hume and Berkeley, reason has been deprived of the ethical function of determining guiding principles for human life while its objective basis has been reduced to 'a chaos of uncoordinated data' to be classified and organized by science.[9] Reason has therefore lost autonomy and become a mere instrument of the productive and social process. It has relinquished the foundational role of furnishing objective content to the ideas of justice, equality, and happiness, and surrendered to heteronomous meanings. As a consequence, these ideas, while preserving their status of ends and purposes, have come to be deprived of a rational relation to an objective reality. Their truth-validity is no longer sanctioned by reason. Reason, by now subjectivized and formalized, limits its range of intervention to the mechanical operations of classifying data and calculating probabilities. The appraisal of the content of its logical operations is instead considered to be beyond its possibilities and thus dismissed as metaphysical.

Horkheimer points out how the process of functionalization of reason strips man of the most fundamental aspect of his intellectual and moral experience:

> Everything and everybody is classified and labeled. The quality of the human that precludes identifying the individual with a class is 'metaphysical' and has no place in empiricist epistemology. The pigeon-hole into which a man is shoved circumscribes his fate. As soon as a thought or a word becomes a tool, one can dispense with actually 'thinking' it, that is, with going through the logical acts involved in verbal formulation of it. ...The advantage of mathematics ...lies in just this 'intellectual economy'. Complicated logical operations are

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[9] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 12.

> carried out without actual performance of all the intellectual acts upon which the mathematical and logical symbols are based. Such mechanization is indeed essential to the expansion of industry; but if it becomes the characteristic feature of minds, if reason itself is instrumentalized, it takes on a kind of materiality and blindness, becomes a fetish, a magic entity that is accepted rather than intellectually experienced.[10]

When the ideals of rationalist metaphysics are divorced from their human content and become empty variables of purely symbolic and operational sentences, a process of dehumanization of thinking creeps in and shakes the foundations of our civilization. Justice, equality, and happiness are not thought of as ends intrinsically worth or reasonable *per se*, but are transformed into functions of blind economic forces. Subjected to the operations of formalized reason, they come to depend upon contingent likes and dislikes.

The dissociation of these expressions of human aspirations from the idea of objective truth deprives them of their rational foundation so that they assume 'a completely irrational aspect.'[11] The Enlightenment, enveloped in the instrumental mechanisms of subjective reason, reverts into its opposite and becomes a new mythology. The promises of human advancement and emancipation it purported to achieve take on the illusory vestiges of technical progress which denies in its own unfolding the philosophical assumptions on the basis of which those promises were made.

The process of subjectivization and formalization of reason reifies our highest concepts and ideas. Severed from any meaningful order and totality, Horkheimer argues, our concepts of justice, equality, and happiness are converted into schemes or plans of actions, that is, into the theoretical equivalents of commodities in the industrial society. As their validity is determined by the practical success or failure of the course of actions by which they are fulfilled, no living relation to our real intentions and aspirations is preserved. Accordingly, the analysis of their content comes to fall into the domain of the logic of probability, while the philosophical examination of their historical development is made obsolete.

In denouncing the instrumental character of reason, Horkheimer dissociates himself from the traditional, conservative critics of civilization. The latter, in his view, fail to recognize the stultification implicit in modern man caused by the social division of labor. Instead of rehabilitating the speculative capacity of reason banned by science, they condemn simultaneously science, subjective reason, and intellectual life as one and the same thing, thus extolling acritically an idealized concept of culture and individuality which has always thwarted human striving for emancipation. By way of this indiscriminate

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[10] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 23.
[11] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 31.

denunciation of enlightenment as such regardless of its contingent historical development as a functional instrument of the processes of economic production, social organization, and administrative planning, reactionary conservatives like Aldous Huxely end up mythologizing a cultured man refractory to civilization, contemptuous of democracy and the masses, and above all eager to relish blind instinctual forces.

Horkheimer rejects both the philosophy of positivism which, in his understanding, regards science as the carrier of progress and for its sake purports to subject humanity to the methods of scientific reasoning, and contemporary revivals of the philosophy of the absolute. He believes that the latter, to which he refers by the collective expression neo-Thomism, by attacking science's reliance on experiment and revaluating intuition and revelation, renovate old methods of domination as well as authoritarian systems of thought.[12] They represent nothing but an artificial attempt to fill the void opened up by the dissolution of the philosophical basis of our beliefs. Rather than criticizing society as it is, these revived systems of objectivist philosophy reproduce the same patterns of domination as scientific theories. Their doctrines are formalized and modeled after the hierarchical order of their thought. They are shaped into a scientific mould in order to satisfy the social necessity of accomodating religious dogmas to the predominant structure of reality and render them pliable to mass manipulation.

On the other hand, Horkheimer contends that positivism reiterates the same sort of absolutism and dogmatism for which it attacks neo-Thomism. By identifying science with truth without offering a philosophical justification of its procedures, positivism ends up into ideology. As the official philosophy of science, it is guilty of a *petitio principii*: for, in order to legitimate the ultimate principles of scientific conduct, it appeals to verifiable experimental observation, that is to the same sort of method that needs to be legitimized.[13]

Horkheimer does not deny the importance of science in the process of civilization. What he objects to is the disregard of positivism for a philosophical justification of the logical and conceptual apparatus of scientific theories:

> If science is to be the authority that stands firm against obscurantism and in demanding this the positivists continue the great tradition of humanism and the Enlightenment - philosophers must set up a criterion for the true nature of science. Philosophy must formulate the concept of science in a way that expresses human resistance to the threatening relapse into mythology and madness, rather than further such a relapse by formalizing science and conforming it to the requirements of existing practice. To be the absolute authority science must be justified as an intellectual principle, not merely deduced from empirical procedures and then made

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[12] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 61.
[13] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 76.

absolute as truth on the basis of dogmatic criteria of scientific success.[14]

Both neo-Thomism and positivism, according to Horkheimer, elude the intellectual examination of their dogmas and principles because their underlying purpose is to master reality and reconcile individual thinking with prevailing structures of domination. They reify natural and spiritual data into *facts,* but fail to connect the world so reified to the social process. Thus, dialectical reflection on the web of relations between facts and social processes should be for Horkheimer the task of philosophy as critical thinking:

> The task of critical reflection is not merely to understand the various facts in their historical connection ... but also to see through the notion of fact itself, in its development and therefore in its relativity. The so-called facts ascertained by quantitative methods, which the positivists are inclined to regard as the only scientific ones, are often surface phenomena that obscure rather than disclose the underlying reality. A concept cannot be accepted as the measure of truth if the ideal of truth that it serves in itself presupposes social processes that thinking cannot accept as ultimates. The mechanical cleavage between origin and thing is one of the blind spots of dogmatic thinking, and to remedy it is one of the most important tasks of a philosophy that does not mistake the congealed form of reality for a law of truth.[15]

Neo-Thomism's and positivism's lack of self-reflection has led them to encourage a pattern of behaviour acquiscent to pragmatic aims. They hypostatize in their own respective systems of thought a set of principles which exclude negation. The only measure of validity they acknowledge is the success or failure of the actions that those principles enact. By doing so, Horkheimer charges, neo-Thomism and positivism seek 'to adapt humanity to common sense or to what theory recognizes as reality',[16] thus *a priori* preventing philosophical reflection from confronting existing and accepted reality to a standard of utopian ideas which could deny its legitimacy. The result is the establishment of 'a state of irrational rationality' in which autonomous reason is replaced by 'the automatism of streamlined mythology' or by 'the authority of a dogma'.[17]

There is a profound discrepancy in the world between the rationality of our cognitive practices designed to regulate the processes of change and the irrationality of the purposes which those practices serve. By the expression 'state of rationality', Horkheimer refers to the realm of means into which science has metamorphosed the sphere of being. The process of subjectivization of reason has reduced nature to the status of a mere object in relation to human subjects.[18] Under the sway of the latter, the world has become a tool for

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[14] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 77.
[15] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 82.
[16] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 90.
[17] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., pp. 90-91.
[18] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 93.

human exploitation. Yet, Horkheimer argues, domination of nature does not serve authentic human purposes. The goals of happiness of the individual or wealth and health which are usually taken up in order to justify mastery of nature are functional to the needs of industrialist society. They simply fulfil the task of creating 'favourable conditions for intellectual and material production.'[19] So much so that man himself becomes object of domination. This occurs because in order for domination of nature to be effective, man is impelled to subjugate not only external nature, human and non-human, but also nature within himself. Domination is internalized, as it were, applied to instincts and inner drives.

Seen from the perspective of man's sacrifice and self-renunciation, subjugation of nature turns out to be irrational. It has no meaningful purpose for human existence but subordination of it to the goals of industrial-technological civilization. Yet, given over to the power of the subject, 'nature is not really transcended or reconciled but merely repressed.'[20] Civilization enacts a mechanism of domination for the sake of domination. In the social Darwinian struggle for survival, the individual is called upon to adjust himself to 'the requirements of the system' in order to secure his own preservation. Self-preservation and preservation of the systematic social totality are strictly linked: To survive, the individual is required to summon all his intellectual and psychological resources and put them in the service of a pattern of rational action consonant with the rationalized and planned arrangements of the system.

Submitted to the deliberations of a planning minority of experts, the autonomous individual relinquishes his power of judgement and relegates himself to the repressive activity of adapting his inner inclinations to the overpowering existing reality. Hence, as the Enlightenment principle of *liberum arbitrium* reverses into 'a principle of domination by which man makes himself a tool of that same nature which he subjugates',[21] the paradox of civilization comes to the fore. On the one hand, civilization liberates consciousness from subordination to any heteronomous standards of conduct and recognizes the free individual as the only source of morality; on the other hand, the gained independence of the individual from mythology and religion fails to express itself in the context of an authentically intellectual competition of ends and ideas. Under the constraint of economic and social forces, the autonomy of the individual turns into passivity. Before the pressure of external circumstances, he learns 'to react automatically, according to general patterns

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[19] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 94.
[20] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid.
[21] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 94.

of adaptation.'[22] Thus, this withdraw of the self to the level of an abstract ego for whom everything in the world is at his own disposal as a means for his own preservation parallels the debasement of reason to the status of a faculty making useful calculations for the sake of man's adjustment to reality.

Horkheimer does not underestimate the advantages for humanity that the increase of material goods has brought about in the course of civilization. His query is rather directed towards the qualitative changes in the nature of the freedom that modern men enjoy nowdays. He acknowledges that in the present high-productivity industrial society ordinary consumers are offered in their luxurious expenditures a range of choices unknown to any previous age. A modern automobile, for instance, makes available to us a number of benefits in terms of efficiency and comforts an old horseman could only dream about. Yet, this increase of potentialities has set upon us such a strain of coercive pressure that we are forced to give up our individuality. The freedom we have gained by supplying ourselves with a car in order to bring within our temporal reach distant spaces is only apparent. As a matter of fact, Horkheimer argues, freedom is constrained by so many restrictions that its quality is fundamentally altered:

> It is as if the innumerable laws, regulations, and directions with which we must comply were driving the car, not we. There are speed limits, warnings to drive slowly, to stop, to stay within certain lanes, and even diagrams showing the shape of the curve ahead. We must keep our eyes on the road and be ready at each instant to react with the right motion. Our spontaneity has been replaced by a frame of mind which compels us to discard every emotion or idea that might impair our alertness to the impersonal demands assailing us.[23]

This is the reality with which man is confronted and to which he is compelled to adapt himself. Whereas in the past the world as it is was constantly opposed for negation to an ideal world existing in the realm of possibilities, in the present industrial society dominated by formalized reason the actual world has been elevated to the status of a normative ideal to which all human possibilities must conform. Philosophical and speculative thought pointed toward an understanding of nature in itself has been liquidated and replaced by pragmatic intelligence focused upon immediate goals. To preside over this process of instrumentalization of reason has been what Horkheimer names 'the ego', that is, the principle of domination. The ego is the inner voice of consciousness, an internalized and sublimated leader who by issuing commands imposes discipline, coherence, and logical order upon the flux of experiences of the subject. In order to shape the life of the individual

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[22] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 97.

[23] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 98.

according to a regular pattern, the ego discharges his domineering power against the sphere of passions, that is, that element in the subject conducive to unbridled nature. The repression of nature within the subject enacts an irreconcilable dualism between the transcendental domain of the ego and the realm of desires whose results have far-reaching consequences. Oppressed, nature rebels against the ego. Behind the seemingly submissive behaviour of the individual, natural impulses refractory to the demands of civilization come to 'lead a devious undercover life.'[24] They never settle to live in harmony with reason.

Horkheimer claims that the primary condition of the process of civilization resides in the transvaluation of man's native mimetic impulses into rational attitudes. Progress demands that men learn to direct their instincts of imitation towards a definite goal. These efforts to curb the most primitive urges in man's inner life in order to bring him to a state of responsibility succeed only if they are accompanied by the messianic promise of a future world of happiness and beatitude resulting from the establishment of the dominion of reason. However, as long as the expectations of a better world are not fulfilled, 'the mimetic impulses lie in wait, ready to break out as a destructive force.'[25]

National Socialism, for example, is for Horkheimer the archetype of the revolt of nature taking on a regressive and distorted form. Although Nazi rebellion against civilization culminated in furthering the tyranny of formalized reason and imposing additional restraints on nature, Horkheimer believes that the launch of the movement was made possible by the exploitation among the discontented German masses of repressed natural drives. Indeed, modern fascism epitomizes the capacity of rationality 'to incorporate in its own system the rebellious potentialities of nature';[26] it instrumentally manipulates suppressed desires for reactionary purposes. But, according to Horkheimer, there is no overcoming of the crisis brought about by the enlightenment and technological progress by regressing to more primitive stages of human development. The creation of new myths proclaiming a return to nature and a delimitation of the domain of spirit 'lead from historically reasonable to utterly barbaric forms of social domination.'[27]

Unfortunately, the revival of old doctrines which exalt nature as a supreme principle is encouraged by the affirmation of the Darwinian theory in the realm of ethics. The

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[24] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 113.
[25] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 116.
[26] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 121.
[27] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 127.

application of the principle of organic evolution to the realm of values introduces into moral life an element of blindness and indeterminacy which reduces reason to the condition of a functional organ in the service of natural selection:

> In popular Darwinism, reason is purely an organ; spirit or mind, a thing of nature. According to a current interpretation of Darwin, the struggle for life must necessarily, step by step, through natural selection, produce the reasonable out of the unreasonable. In other words, reason, while serving the function of dominating nature, is whittled down to being a part of nature; it is not an independent faculty but something organic, like tentacles or hands, developed through adaptation to natural conditions and surviving because it proves to be an adequate means of mastering them, especially in relation to acquiring food and averting danger. As a part of nature, reason is at the same time set against nature - the competitor and enemy of all life that is not its own.[28]

As reason becomes an epiphenomenon of bluntly natural processes, philosophy abdicates the foundational task of discovering the truth implicit in the concept of nature. Its commitment to analyze the value of what is given as natural is withdrawn in favour of an empirical undertaking aimed at mastering those forces standing in the way of self preservation. Horkheimer warns, though, that to identify the good with the well-adapted while leaving unquestioned the value of that to which the organism adapts itself 'culminates in a confusing of philosophical truth with self-preservation and war':

> The equating of reason and nature, by which reason is debased and raw nature exalted, is a typical fallacy of the era of rationalization. Instrumentalized subjective reason either eulogizes nature as pure vitality or disparages it as brute force, instead of treating it as a text to be interpreted by philosophy that, if rightly read, will unfold a tell of infinite suffering. Without committing the fallacy of equating nature and reason, mankind must try to reconcile the two.[29]

Horkheimer 's project for critical theory seems to resume, as it were, the reflective and speculative activity of theological and metaphysical thought in order to come to assist nature without either overriding it abruptly or regressing to its primitive urges. The full explication of how reason and nature come to be dialectically mingled is the task of Adorno's philosophical enterprise.

III. Adorno's Theory of Progress

A myriad of common elements ranging from the understanding of the activity of philosophy in terms of dialectical reflection to the ambition of accounting for the nature of the actual world by recollecting the past history of human civilization run through both

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[28] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 125.
[29] Cf. Max Horkheimer, ibid., p. 125-26.

Adorno's thought and Hegel's philosophy of history. Yet, Adorno's perception of his own relation to Hegel was always one of uneasiness if not obsession at all. So much so that one could dare to read Adorno's philosophical effort as constantly guided by the determination to avoid the Hegelian tendency to absolutize the categories of the system with almost no fear of incurring into the fallacy of interpretive reductionism.

One way in which Adorno sought to escape from the rigidity of Hegel's system was by presenting his own thought in fragments.[30] Adorno never conceived of organizing his work into a coherent and organic whole. Relish of aporia is a trademark of his writings. To a reader who sets out to follow the peripeties of his tortuous reasoning, he comes across as, to use Benhabib's characterization, 'an ethnologist of advanced civilization.'[31] He understands as his critical task 'to illuminate those cracks in the totality, those fissures in the social net, those moments of disharmony and discrepancy, through which the untruth of the whole is revealed and glimmers of another life become visible.'[32]

To this adversity to systematic thought belong also his fragmentary meditations on the idea of progress. Indeed, apart from a lecture given in 1962, Adorno never offered a detailed analysis of progress. Nevertheless, scattered across his various texts, one can find innumerable insightful remarks on the issue. But, above all, his entire work, insofar as it is reduceable to a unity, can be seen as a critique of 'the progressivist illusion.'[33]

Maintaining his hostility to definitions, in his 1962 lecture Adorno describes progress as an undefinable concept. Any attempt at specifying and determining its content, he states, destroys the unity af the concept into a plurality of mere contiguous moments. To be sure, in this remark the echo of the Hegelian jargon strongly resonates, yet we should not allow ourselves to be deceived by it. In fact, it is precisely against Hegel and what is named 'the logic of disintegration' that Adorno abstains from giving definitions, as a passage from *Negative Dialectics* clarifies:

> Any definition that appears noncontradictory turns out to be as contradictory as the ontological models of "Being" and "Existenz". From philosophy we can obtain nothing positive that would be identical with its construction. In the process of demythologization, positivity must be denied all the way down to the reason that is the instrument of demythologization. The idea of reconcilment forbids the positive positing of reconcilment as a concept.[34]

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[30] Cf. G. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, The Macmillian Press LTD, London, 1978, p. 52.

[31] Cf. S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 182.

[32] Cf. S. Benhabib, ibid., p. 181.

[33] Cf. M. Loewy and E. Varikas, "The World Spirit on the Fins of a Rocket: Adorno's Critique of Progress", in *Radical Philosophy*, 70, March/April 1995, pp. 9-16, p. 9.

[34] Cf., T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Routledge, London, 1973, p., 145.

According to Adorno, definitions must not be given because they reproduce in themselves, as their immanent contradiction, the antithesis of thought to what is heterogeneous to it. The task of philosophical thinking is not 'to cling to the idea of something beyond contradiction',[35] but to display the tension between the concept and the reality it covers so as to see, on the one hand, whether the reality fulfils the concept, and, on the other hand, whether the concept is not abstractly removed from reality.

Thus, it is in the essence of the concept of progress to refuse univocity. Yet, although progress as a philosophical term is equivocal, Adorno claims that it can be employed roughly with no risk of misunderstanding, since everyone knows more or less accurately what is meant by it. So, without defying his resistance to totalization and abstract conceptualization, he sets out to articulate the web of antionomies and contradictions into which the concept of progress is entangled. To a first scrutiny, it appears to him that progress is strictly linked to the idea of humanity. In Kant, he emphasizes, the doctrine of progress entails a notion of universal history. Kant assumes that 'the highest purpose of nature' lies in the development of all mankind's capacities. But such a development can be accomplished only in a society 'with the greatest freedom'. And since the completion of this goal involves the constitution of a perfectly just civic society, 'progress has its place in a concept of history that for Kant is emphatically universal or cosmopolitan, not a history of particular spheres of life.'[36]

There is for Adorno no idea of progress without an idea of humanity. Quoting Benjamin, he underlines however that progress of skill and knowledge should not be confused with human progress. Benjamin, he continues, points out that the idea of progress carries with it a redemptive moment. In his view, we cannot speak of progress without including in its notion the idea of happiness of future generations. Given that humanity faces total destruction, 'no progress should be supposed in such a way as to imply there already is such a thing as humanity which therefore simply could progress'. On the contrary, it is a condition of having progress that 'progress would produce humanity itself.'[37]

To be sure, in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which Adorno refers to, Benjamin is more concerned with propounding a pronouncement of incompleteness of the

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[35] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid., p. 146.
[36] Cf. T. Adorno, "Progress", in *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. XV, Fall-Winter 1983-84, pp. 55-70, p. 56.
[37] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid., p. 57.

work of the past within a historical materialist framework than with the preservation of future generations, though the two things to a certain extent go together. Here is a passage showing his standing:

> Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.[38]

Benjamin rejects Hegel's philosophy of history which hypostazises a necessary dialectical link between the historical events and whose unfolding leads to a final redemption. He describes history as 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage.'[39] This pile of debris can be stopped from 'reaching up to the sky' only by the proletariat with the support of its science, namely historical materialism, both called upon to bring the movement of history to a standstill. The flow of history comes to a halt, according to Benjamin, when it 'crystallizes into a monad, that is when its configuration is constructed as something immediately present and the historical materialist recognizes in this structure the sign of a messianic cessation of happening.'[40]

By the expression "crystallization of history into a monad" Benjamin means the revolutionary outcome advocated by Marx, but, contrary to the latter, he covers his secularized idea of liberation with theological vestiges. After reading the historical events in Russia and Germany in the late 1930's as evidence of a departure of the Marxian theory from praxis, he calls for historical materialism to abandon philosophy and take on the service of theology if it wants to have a chance of 'winning the match' of the class struggle.[41] In this respect, he expresses the wish that historical materialism will be able to awaken the dead. We must not leave the dead to bury their dead, he observes, as though our task were that of ratifying that what has been lost has been lost and no alternative praxis is available. Were we to relinquish the wish of redeeming our dead, they would die a second time.

Benjamin rejects the teleological view of history as progressive development. History

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[38] Cf. W Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1973, Thes. II, p. 256.

[39] Cf. W. Benjamin, ibid., Thes. IX, p. 259.

[40] Cf. W. Benjamin, ibid., Thes. XVII, pp. 264-265.

[41] On this point see R. Tiedemann, "Historical Materialism or Political Messianism: An Interpretation of the Theses 'On the Concept of History'", in *Philosophical Forum*, 15, Fall-Winter 1984, pp. 71-104.

for him proceeds by both continuity and discontinuity. Accordingly, in order to realize a new beginning, he assigns to the historical materialist the task of constructing history not by repeating in thought those epic moments of the past which represent a rapture in the continuum of history, but by recreating them in discontinuity with the past. As Tiedemann clarifies, Benjamin's project is an eschatological one:

> Benjamin has attempted to establish "the discontinuity of historical time" and its political and practical complement, "the destructive power of the working class", "at the foundations of the materialistic view of history". This attempt terminates in the concept of history as "one single catastrophe" which dominates the image in the ninth thesis. "Catastrophe as the continuum of history" means an absolute, not a specific, negation of progress. "Catastrophe is progress, progress is catastrophe" - thus history becomes a mythical *nunc stans* which extends itself into the present. "The concept of progress should be based on the idea of catastrophe. That things just 'keep on going' *is* the catastrophe. It isn't that which always lies ahead, but that which always is given". The proposition that at some point it would not go on can therefore not be included in a teleology of history in a Hegelian sense. Nor can it be sought in the historical labor of humanity, which - in the Marxist sense - seizes upon the inherent contradictions of the present and propels them to a higher social formation. If "the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule" [...] "then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency". This "real state of emergency" which the revolution is to produce appears as the Other of history. It is not merely the end of the class struggle, but the end of history itself: *this* was not how Marx imagined the conclusion of the prehistory of human society. And *the* revolution which would bring about this state of emergency would also be far from the proletarian revolution Marx hoped for: it would be an apocalyptic destruction, an eschatological finish. The historical materialist who disguises himself as "the angel of history" may not be one after all.[42]

This eschatological import is alien to Adorno's philosophy. He, too, claims that history is the unity of continuity and discontinuity, but he does not follow Benjamin in jettisoning the possibility and, indeed, the necessity of a universal philosophy of history. He acknowledges that Hegel's philosophy of history is overloaded with a set of metaphysical assumptions under whose weight the concept of reality evaporates, yet he maintains that Hegel's insight that 'the particular is unthinkable without the universal' is one which philosophy cannot do without.

Adorno argues that Hegel's idea of a philosophy of history rests upon the conceptual dualism between phenomenality and totality. In Hegel's jargon, he expands, the expression 'totality' refers to the world spirit, that is the total movement of history in which all individual facts are synthesized. To experience the world spirit as a whole means, for Adorno, to experience its negativity. This means, in turn: Since reconciliation with the totality of the world spirit transcends individual achievements, the latter are experienced by consciousness as finite and only, after being denied, are integrated into the totality - that is, the total concatenation of humanity - to which they are internally linked. So understood,

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[42] Cf. R Tiedemann, ibid., pp. 94-95.

world spirit is not a metaphysical hypostatization but denotes a concrete meaning teleologically inherent in the concept of society.

It is one of the most recurrent themes of Hegel's philosophy to show individual consciousness experiencing the order of the world as alien and hostile because it cannot recognize itself in it. Yet, Hegel contends also that, in order to survive, people often adapt themeselves to the universal even though their consciousness experiences it as opposed to themselves. Adorno dismisses this solution of the antagonism between consciousness and the world as a mere 'appearance of reconciliation'.[43]

In this respect, he emphasizes that, to the extent that Hegel does not question the irrational forms - which include either the need for self-preservation or the state of dominion abused by the stronger - by which the individuals have been integrated into unity in the course of history, he ignores the antagonistic dialectic occurring between totality and individuality. Consequently, the identity that Hegel's absolute self-consciousness achieves is contradictory. 'It perpetuates non-identity in suppressed and damaged form',[44] he claims. In this identity, in which nothing particular is tolerated, the universal is imposed upon the particular in such a way that the resulting unity turns out to be conflictual in itself.

However, Adorno qualifies, these incursions into the unity of Hegel's spirit with the intent of breaking the continuity of the historical process should not go so far as to undermine the concept of universal history. Discontinuity and universal history must be conceived together:

> Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history - the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the total menace which organized mankind poses to organized men, in the epitome of discontinuity. It is the horror that verifies Hegel and stands him on his head. If he transfigured the totality of historic suffering into the positivity of the self-realizing absolute, the One and All that keeps rolling on to this day - with occasional breathing spells - would teleologically be the absolute of suffering.[45]

By preserving the notion of universal history, Adorno goes beyond Benjamin's reversal of progress into total catastrophe and his historical-materialist imperative of a sudden, radical rapture of the continuum of history. Although the passage quoted above may be taken as evidence to the contrary, Adorno does not believe that the pile of debris accumulated in the

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[43] Cf. T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 312.
[44] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid., p. 318.
[45] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid., p. 320.

course of history can be redeemed at once and turned into absolute positivity. According to him, there is an immanent teleology implicit in the idea of progress which derives from Augustine's conception of history as salvation history. Augustine imagined humanity 'moving in the continuum of time toward the heavenly realm.'[46] But later the Enlightenment, by shifting humanity's redemption from the *civitas dei* to the *civitas terrena*, thus 'making concrete the idea of progress so as to be able to be realized',[47] has levelled it out onto what merely is. Progress has ended up celebrating the existing and surrounding what is with an aura of redemption. At this point, philosophical reflection on progress faces a dilemma: 'if progress is equated with redemption, as simple transcendent intervention, it surrenders any comprehensible meaning with the dimension of time, and evaporates into ahistorical theology';[48] if, instead, it is lowered down to the movement of history, then this mediation 'threatens to make it an idol, and with it the absurdity, both in reflection on the concept and in reality, that what inhibits progress is what counts as progress.'[49]

Adorno refuses to resolve this dilemma. The concept of progress is for him irreduceable to either facticity or the pure idea, and this contradiction must be accepted as such. Indeed, progress unfolds historically along the lines of an antagonism between, in Augustine's jargon, what is of heaven and what is of the earth. In other words, redemption, which constitutes the transcendent telos of history, exists only in tension with history. It cannot 'break out of the immanent process of enlightenment' because enlightenment in its historical labor presupposes 'the concept of humanity which alone raises itself above the immanence of the world.'[50]

In this dialectical understanding of progress is condensed, as it were, Adorno's departure from Hegel's notion of reconciliation as the final closure of the system. Where Hegel postulates the speculative identity of concept and object so as to show that the reality of appearance is the actualization of its latent possibilities, Adorno understands as the task of immanent critique - which he transforms into negative dialectics - unendingly to destructure both the object and the concept of the object so as to show, on the one hand, that the object is not what it seeks to be, that is its concept, and, on the other hand, that the

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[46] Cf. T. Adorno, "Progress", cit., p. 58.

[47] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid.

[48] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid.

[49] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid. This dilemma applies also to Benjamin's eschatological view, in spite of the fact that he does not conceive of the redeemer as a Messiah coming from outside, but sees him as embodied in the making of historical materialism *in alliance* with theology.

[50] Cf. T. Adorno, ibid., p. 59.

concept fails to be what in fact is, that is its object, for it is always brought from outside. By doing so, Adorno 'dissolves the rigidity of the temporally and spatially fixed object into a field of tension of the possible and the real.'[51] The object is constantly shown to be false and therefore is negated. In its facticity - that is, necessity - it never reachs an end point of reconciliation with its truth - that is, possibility - for its truth resides in an illusory totality in which all moments of individuality are absorbed into the whole. Let us see how these methodological principles apply to the issue of progress and enlightenment.

According to Adorno, the reconciliation of spirit and nature upon which the modern model of enlightenment rests betrays a spellbound allegiance of thinking to the Hegelian 'demon of identity'. Under the logic of identity, nature becomes a product of spirit, that is a mere function of the dynamic of reason. Disenchantment of the world and control of inner and outer nature are inescapable moments of the idea of reconciliation underlying the project of the Enlightenment. This unfolds in a ruthless practice of intellectualization and rationalization of mythical modes of apprehension aimed at extirpating animism from the world and establishing in its place the sovereignty of human knowledge. By unmasking the mythological deities as anthropomorphic projections onto nature of the subjective,[52] the Enlightenment releases man from fear in the power of fanciful entities like spirits and demons allegedly hidden behind material things and natural phenomena. Accordingly, as supernatural entities are dissolved into superstitious constructions and mirror images of frightened men, the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what is reduceable to measurable quantities within a system of calculability.

This process of abstraction whereby qualitative differences are reduced to quantitative equivalences enables, for Adorno, the subordination of empirical phenomena to natural laws, thus reproducing the mythological illusion that events in reality follow a repeated pattern which allows humanity to escape from the power of the unpredictable. Seen in this light, the systematic conceptualization of the world achieved by modern science is nothing but the expansion of mythological symbolism to a more advanced stage. Scientific explanations are therefore shown to be sublimated magic practices performed for the sake of preservation, while propositions attained *via* deductive method, far from communicating authentic discoveries, turn out to exhibit a content which was already known from the start.

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[51] Cf. T. Adorno, "Sociology and Empirical Research", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, Heineman, London, 1969, p. 69; plus S. Benhabib, *Norm, Critique, and Utopia*, cit., pp. 171-174.

[52] Cf. T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, London, p. 6.

The affirmation of the rationality of self-preservation implies, in Adorno's view, also domination of man's inner nature:

> Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken; for the substance which is dominated, suppressed, and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination: it is in fact what is to be preserved... The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice. In other words: the history of renunciation. Everyone who practices renunciation gives away more of his life than is given back to him: and more than the life that he vindicates.[53]

These considerations suggest for Adorno that the identity established by spirit in the enlightenment model is an antagonistic one. In his struggle for reconciliation, spirit incorporates the otherness of nature only in the self-identity of the empty and tautological formula of the "I=I". What spirit really wants is identity with itself *via* suppression of the other. Nature remains the other of spirit to be subjugated and dominated. As a consequence, power criteria creep in the categories of scientific thought. These do not correspond to a real content in the world but are expressions of social domination. The deductive structures of scientific theories speak of the hierarchy and coercion of the social order. Thought forms reflect the unity of the whole in which the individual is subjected to the universal, whereas the necessity springing from their inner relations displays the apparent solidity of the social compact with its repressive structures.

Logical necessity apparently governs the evolution of industrial society today and takes on the characteristic of the ancient Fate. The masses regard the accomodation of their lives to the needs of the administered system as an objective necessity 'against which they believe there is nothing they can do.'[54] Yet, the necessity that transpires from the rational organization of society is for Adorno illusory. The reality is that man has left natural necessity behind to fetter himself to institutions and practices of domination which reproduce socially the domination of nature. If today the prospect of man's future freedom is not visible, it is because enlightenment has restricted the function of thinking to the reified domains of 'mathematics, machine, and organization', thus 'relinquishing its own realization.'[55] Nevertheless, the concept of progress lives on historically only by constantly renewing the promise of removal of necessity.

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[53] Cf. T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, ibid., pp. 54-55.
[54] Cf. T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, cit., p. 38.
[55] Cf. T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, ibid. p. 41.

According to Adorno, a revival of the utopian vision of human liberation requires that domination be recognized as unreconciled nature and a form of dialectical thought capable of rescuing the concept of freedom from the tautological hypostatizations of spirit prevail. In setting out to achieve this program, he purports to single out a point of view on progress fluctuating between the critique of its historical implementation and the preservation of its emancipatory intent without postulating a totalizing concept of it. This point of view corresponds, as it were, to an 'ethical position whose criterion is neither the degree to which human understanding advances, nor the emancipatory potential of that advance, but rather the degree to which this promise of emancipation has been realized.'[56]

Dismissed as a conclusive category, progress becomes therefore a negative concept, that is a philosophical rod whereby it becomes possible to denounce the dangers of regression that fetishism of progress as pure dominion of technique originates. The fact that Adorno's critical standpoint is limited to negativity does not cancel, though, the positive moment implicit in the dialectic of progress. Resistance to the triumph of evil is a positive act which is undertaken in the hope that things will get better and one day good will prevail. The peculiarity of Adorno's position resides precisely in his determination not to swing the philosophical pendulum toward one or the other side of the dialectical duality. He rejects both the positive and the negative philosophies of history: the former, because they rest upon a notion of teleology, in the Hegelian version, or linear temporality, in the Marxist productivist paradigm, which the failure of the march of history to release humanity from suffering and realize the promise of freedom has made untenable;[57] the latter, because they hypostatize unfreedom as an ontological category, that is a category

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[56] Cf. M Loewy and E. Varikas, "The World Spirit on the Fins of a Rocket: Adorno's Critique of Progress", cit., p. 12.

[57] Martin Jay, Juergen Habermas, and Seyla Benhabib are credited with an interpretation of Adorno which sees him as moving away from Marx's philosophy of history and projecting humanity's prospects of reconciliation into a utopian horizon. Yet, against what he labels "the hegemonic interpretation of Adorno", K. J. Heller attributes to Adorno both a positive philosophical anthropology, analogous to Marx's, according to which 'need for freedom is inherent to human nature', and a Marxist productivist paradigm, according to which, since repression is caused by material scarcity, 'the development of mankind's productive forces is a necessary condition for the eradication of repression'. However, although Heller's argument is based upon some textual evidence, it succeeds more to re-balance than to thoroughly subvert the current state of interpretation of Adorno among his scholars. To make the picture even more complicated, it must be added that the attribution to Marx of an acritically positive philosophy of history is highly controversial. As Adorno himself points out, Marx admitted the possibility of relapse into barbarism. Cf. K. J. Heller, "Adorno Against the Grain: Re-reading Theodor Adorno's Philosophy of History", in *Praxis International*, 11 (3), 1991, pp. 354-376.

inherent to the essence of human nature, and 'end up supporting the repressive status quo they purport to oppose.'[58]

Rejection of the negative philosophies of history is part of Adorno's refusal to advocate romantic calls for a return to nature. He holds that civilization results from humanity's need to confront and transform nature[59] so as to overcome the primordial condition of material scarcity. To break the bondage of nature is therefore a necessary condition of human freedom. Counter-Enlightenment naturalists who posit freedom in the depths of the soul and reify it as an inner voice speaking from a transcendent source disregard the struggle that man in the course of history had to wage against nature in order to survive. They do not see that freedom develops in a dialectic between subject and object, through resistance to the blind necessity of nature. In this respect, Adorno admonishes that, as long as reconciliation with nature is meant as restoration of an idyllic primordial unity with it, man risks being given over to irrational forces beyond his control. Hence, instead of postulating a dubious orginal state of harmony as a *historical datum,* he employs *the memory* of it as a dialectical expedient designed to counteract excessive and deformed subjugation of nature. In his view, recollection of a past happiness, whether real or mythical it may be, can operate as a lever to break through the continuity of history and end its eternally recurrent spectacle of domination.

IV. Habermas on Dialectic of Enlightenment

According to Habermas, Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* holds out a negative philosophy of history that accounts for the process whereby reason relinquishes its original demands for liberation and justice and reverts into its opposite. He argues that the two authors of the Frankfurt School, by claiming the existence of a secret complicity between myth and enlightenment, intend to dispute the conventional understanding of the latter in terms of a counterforce to the authoritarian normativity of tradition. From their analysis, enlightenment emerges as a process constantly suspended between distantiation from the mythic origins and relapse into mythology. If enlightenment has described itself as a movement of thought vindicating the superiority of rational argument over the ungrounded propositions of religion and metaphysics, Habermas contends that Horkheimer

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[58] See Adorno's comments on Spengler and Huxely in *Prisms*, Neville Spearman, London, 1961, pp. 53-72 and 95-117; plus *The Jargon of Authenticity,* Routledge, London, 1973.

[59] Cf. T. Adorno, *Prisms*, cit., p. 67.

and Adorno put forward a thesis asserting that moments of rationalization are embedded with the same patterns of self-deception which constitute ancient mythological symbolism.[60]

In Habermas's interpretation, the Janus-face nature of what he labels as the world-historical process of enlightenment is revealed by the adventures of Odysseus in his search for the *homeland*, a symbolical site where Adorno and Horkheimer locate the genealogical origin of modern consciousness. The experiences of the Homeric hero tell a story of dramatic struggle of the ego to gain identity by learning to repress nature within itself. Renunciation and introversion of sacrifice are the price that it pays for acquisition of self-knowledge. Dark, mythic forces of nature pose countless obstacles in Odysseus' way so that he is forced to draw on the most remote resources of his intelligence in order to overcome them. In this perspective, his final landing on Ithaca marks the triumph of human skill and intelligence over an archaic nature still inhabited by mythical dreadful powers.

Yet, Adorno and Horkheimer detect in Odysseus's success the ambivalent nature of reason. The rationality that he exhibits during his journey is an instrumental one, a kind of rationality made up of a set of expediences and cunning devices whose only goal is self-preservation. According to them, Odysseus is the prototype of the modern bourgeois individual whose existence is at the centre of an unreconciled dialectic between desire for self-consciousness and temptation to turn back to undifferiantiated chaos.

In the narrative of Odysseus's encounter with the Syrens all the features of bourgeois life - that is, risk taking, renunciation, and sublimation of instincts into art - are contemplated. Odysseus takes the risk of listening to the song of the Syrens even though he knows that, were he to yield to the promise of primordial deadly pleasure that they evoke, his chances of getting home - that is, his chances of emancipation from the primordial forces of nature - would vanish. However, his risk is a calculated one. Before setting out to sail through the waters visited by the Syrens, he makes sure that his body is fettered to the mast so that his urge to abandon himself to their seduction remains thwarted. Of course, the suffering caused by the renunciation to regress to prerational pleasure is compensated by artistic sublimation. While the ropes fetter him more and more tightly to the mast as he listens to the song of the Syrens, he learns to appreciate the beauty that the song conveys so that it is made liable to become object of aesthetic contemplation.

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[60] Cf. J. Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno", in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 107.

Habermas suggests that the adventures of Odysseus as they are explained by Adorno and Horkheimer seem to evoke the vicissitudes of Hegel's Spirit through its incarnations in the experiences of consciousness. Yet, acting as a force motivated merely by a drive to self-preservation, he claims that the "spirit" at work in the process of enlightenment emerging from the *Dialectic* appears to enact a paralyzing movement that mutilates reason. Thus, in this respect, if one considers the revenge that the forces of inner nature take upon the emancipated self, one realizes that Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism would probably offer a better paradygm to elucidate what Adorno and Horkheimer intend to show in the *Dialectic*. They certainly share Nietzsche's belief that, with the demise of religious and metaphysical claims to truth, all normative standards of our morality are no longer tenable.[61] This holds true despite a substantial philosophical difference obtaining between Nietzsche and the two authors of the *Dialectic*. For Nietzsche, the death of God unveils all our theoretical and moral judgements as manifestations of the will to power; Adorno and Horkheimer, instead, refrain from asserting that sheer will to power is the exclusive motivational force underlying knowledge and morality but maintain that, especially under the authority of modern science, the moments of reason have regressed to instrumental rationality in the service of self-preservation.

Habermas argues that Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of enlightenment is oversimplified, incomplete, and onesided. He points out that it fails to do justice to 'the rational content of cultural modernity that was captured in bourgeois ideals (and also instrumentalized along with them)'. He emphasizes 'the specific theoretical dynamic that continually pushes the sciences, and even the self-reflection of the sciences, beyond merely engendering technically useful knoweledge.'[62] Coherently, he sets out to disclose the motives prompting Adorno and Horkheimer to undertake the task of critique of enlightenment. In doing so, he associates the *Dialectic* to the Marxist stream of ideology critique which attempts to explain all theoretical validity claims in terms of relationships of power. The outcome is that, when the truth of enlightenment itself comes under suspicion and is revealed to be tainted with myth, the presupposition of purity and autonomy of reason is seriously undermined.

Habermas identifies the gist of Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic* precisely in the claim that a demythologized understanding of the world is an illusion. In his view, the *Dialectic* reflects a radicalization of ideology critique which is now applied to

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[61] Cf. Juergen Habermas, ibid., p. 111.
[62] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid., p. 113.

enlightenment itself in order to exposes its own foundations. However, he claims that, in turning against reason, Adorno and Horkheimer fall into contradiction. In fact, since they conduct the critique of reason with the intent of enlightening, they must assume the universal validity of critique, thus coming to face an irreconcilable paradox. On the one hand, their critical investigation into the foundations of the process of enlightenment aims at exposing critical self-reflection as suspicious; on the other hand, in the same act of conducting their critical analysis they cannot do without totalized critique. As a result, Habermas dismisses this description of the self-destruction of the critical capacity as paradoxical 'because in the moment of description it still has to make use of the critique that has been declared dead. It denounces the Enlightenment's becoming totalitarian with its own tools.'[63]

In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche, too, Habermas contends, took the step of unmasking the binding of power and validity by totalizing critique. But his move was philosophically justified by his theory of the will to power as the creative source of values. After having reduced all validity claims to value judgements and disclosed the notions of true and false as mere expressions of preferences of taste, Nietzsche turned totalized ideology critique into genealogy critique.[64] *Derivation* and *descent*, nearness to the origin, to what is earlier and more primordial became the new criteria of rank by which 'to discriminate between a power that *deserves* to be esteemed and one that *deserves* to be devalued.'[65] Therefore, by elevating genealogical localizations of power to the level of a critical and normative principle, Nietzsche endowed himself with the conceptual means necessary to carry out the exercise of critique against 'the sovereignty of the ideals of science and universalistic morality'.

Unfortunately, according to Habermas, this tool is not available for Adorno and Horkheimer as long as they are motivated in their critical practice by the intent of enlightening. While disclosing that reason is entwined with myth, they refuse in fact to abandon the world to an irreconcilable struggle between powers, 'as if it *were* the mythic world.'[66] Consequently, in a Hegelian fashion, they opt to retain in the course of their meditations the rational criterion of determinate negation. Yet, unlike Hegel, they do not pursue a final closure for the chain of contradictions and overcomings, but keep open the paradox of ideology critique as applied to reason, thus leaving critique to float on a

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[63] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid., p. 119.
[64] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid., p. 125.
[65] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid.
[66] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid. p. 127.

groundless ground with no ultimate guarantee of its undisputed validity.

In answer to Habermas's argument, Christopher Rocco suggests that the conceptual contradiction in which the *Dialectic* is caught - between denunciation of theoretical totality and use of the same totality for a comprehensive critique of reason - can be removed by pointing out that it operates at two different levels: a) a level of philosophical content at which Western rationalism is criticized for its penchant to include everything within the unity of the system and tolerate nothing outside of it; b) a level of formal structure which refers to the armature of the book as a synopsis of excursuses, appendixes, drafts, and aphorisms. Thus, he contends that

> the formal structure of the *Dialectic*... enacts the very process of disintegration it describes, simultaneously reflecting and criticizing the reality it seeks to comprehend: reflecting because of its fragmentation, criticizing because the fragmentary character of the book is mediated by a thematic coherence (each chapter is a variation on the theme that myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment reverts to mythology) that makes the book a whole and so allows it to achieve that plurality within unity that eludes enlightenment itself. ...It is precisely the structure of the book, its disintegration into fragments, that questions its own and enlightenment's epistemological claims and opposes the impulse toward totality in both system and critique.[67]

This solution of the *Dialectic*'s aporia appears to be overcontrived. To say that the philosophical content of the critique denies the formal structure of the text which encompasses that same content amounts to reproducing the logical fallacy of dropping the ladder away once it has been used to climb up the tree. As I argued in the former section, Adorno's and Horkheimer's dilemma of attempting to dismantle the systematic and totalizing structures of modernity by employing at the same time the tool of total theory must be left in its unresolved openness. As Benhabib suggests, 'it must not be abandoned but continually practised and revived through negative dialectics.'[68] The substantive vision of a systemic closure in which men finally come to live in harmony with nature and with themselves serves as a critical rod whereby it becomes possible to mount the attack against the failure of modernity to realize its emancipatory potential. It is to be recalled, however, that this vision makes no claim to total actualization. From the utopian dimension onto which it has been projected, it plays the regulative function of guiding the direction of the critique. Yet, while reviving the illusion of a final reconciliation of social antagonism, the critique must simultaneously demystify it so as not to give in to the temptation implicit in

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[67] Cf. C. Rocco, "Between Modernity and Postmodernity: Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* against the Grain", in *Political Theory*, vol. 22, No 1, 1994, pp. 71-97, p. 85-86.

[68] Cf. S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, cit., p. 181.

'conceptual thinking' of using actuality as a mere vessel into which empting the unmediated contents of thought.[69]

By presenting myth as disposition of rationalization and certain aspects of modern progress as regression to archaic barbarism, Adorno and Horkheimer conjure up a dialectical mechanism for demythologizing the present and exposing our unreflective belief in the myth of history as progress to critical assessment. Under the scrutiny of their dialectical analysis, the structures of civilized modernity no longer emerge in their reified form as naturally given, while simultaneously all nostalgic claims for a return to a falsely idealized past are made to appear untenable. In this respect, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not an attempt to deny the emancipatory achievements of enlightened reason and advocate a negative philosophy of history. On the contrary, it vindicates most of the conquests of civilization as progressive as well as acknowledges the material benefits that enlightenment has brought about in relation to the capacity of the modern world to satisfy the fundamental needs of society.

Yet, Adorno and Horkheimer cannot refrain themselves from denouncing the failure of modernity to deliver the promises of justice, freedom, equality, and individual autonomy that accompanied its advent. They emphasize that, while neglecting these goals, enlightened reason has taken the path of instrumental reason and narrowed its ambit of application to the domains of scientific enterprise, technological development, and bureaucratic organization of society. Enlightenment has gone so far in the direction of formalistic reason that modern barbarism can be seen as a crystallized mirror image of the self-destructive logic underlying its ratio. The Holocaust, for example, with its 'deadly combination of myth (anti-Semitism) and enlightenment (beaurocratically and rationally organized mass murder)' represents the most prominent logical outcome of the extension of the structures of formal reason to all spheres of life.[70]

If the Enlightenment promised to emancipate man from tradition and establish reason as the only court of judgement to assess the validity of our moral and cognitive claims, Adorno and Horkheimer warn us against the self-deceitful and self-destructive forces operating within human reason and intellect. They point out that enlightenment, while promising to release man from natural necessity, simultaneously locks him in the iron cage of a second nature made up of inescapable machanisms of domination, discipline, and control. Enlightenment, they admonish, provides the individual with rational instruments

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[69] Cf. S. Benhabib, ibid.

[70] Cf. C. Rocco, "Between Modernity and Postmodernity: Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Against the Grain", cit., p. 79.

to shape the world and give form to their own existence, and yet it hands them over to an impersonal apparatus of institutions, norms, and abstract constraints which neutralize any possible space for the fulfilment of individual autonomy.

Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique highlights the mutual implication in Western history of reason and myth, liberation and slavery, self-determination and heteronomous dependence. It would be misleading, however, to draw from this exposition of the paradoxical nature of enlightenment the conclusion that they relinquish in the *Dialectic* faith in human progress and in the power of reason. Their dialectical reconstruction of the history of civilization does not account for a reversal of Western rationalism into irrationality, but limits itself to denouncing the betrayal of enlightenment's original commitment to justice, freedom, and equality. The problem with enlightenment is not that it has exhausted its driving force to pursuing human liberation, but that its emancipatory potential has been left to a great extent unrealized and therefore needs to be redeemed.

V. Between Archaism and Utopia: Marcuse's Vision of Human Liberation

I claimed in section III that Adorno assigns the task of reconciliation to an act of recollection of the primordial unity between man and nature. This redemptive effort, however, risks being seriously undermined in present industrial-technological civilization, for the dynamic of cultural change unfolds in a way which tends to deny the past. In the one-dimensional society in which all areas of life have been colonized by the criteria of instrumental action and rational decision, culture ceases to be a repository of collective memory. History is forgotten and with it all those hopes and unfulfilled promises of the past whose memory could be reactivated and projected onto the present as a living historical possibility. As a consequence, the prospects of human redemption are removed from the continuum of history and cast into a point outside time. To reabsorb them into the historical process becomes a desperate enterprise.

Marcuse seeks to resolve the dilemma of how to overcome the all-pervasive structures of rationalization in a world from which the autonomous individual has been extirpated and the memories of past aspirations banished, by identifying in the sensuous realm a subversive potential for redemption. However, as I will show throughout an analysis of *Eros and Civilization*, this endeavour turns out to be incapable of offering a real prospect of future transformation, thus remaining confined to a retrospective standpoint which, while inspecting the entire process of civilization, is suspended between mythology

and utopia.

Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* is an attempt to question Freud's assertion that civilization goes hand in hand with repression. Freud's theory of civilization can be summed up in Marcuse's view in the two following propositions: 1) that civilization is based upon the subjugation of human instincts. According to Freud, the principle governing the process of Western emancipation from natural necessity demands that the satisfaction of immediate urges be delayed and the resulting repressed impulses be sublimated into socially useful or cultural activities; 2) that repression belongs to the essence of civilization as such, thus ruling out any possible alternative to the condition of unfreedom and domination of man by man pervading the present industrial-technological world.

While accepting 1), Marcuse rejects 2). He acknowledges that progress as it has unfolded itself so far in the manifestations of mastery of nature, mechanization and standardization of life, and intellectual impoverishment leads to man's self-destruction. Yet, he contests the claim that the dialectic of progress and domination constitutes a permanent feature of civilization and traces its causes back to 'a specific historical organization of human existence.'[71] He also identifies in the web of Freud's theory itself the interstices disclosing the possibility of a non-repressive civilization. This enables him to theoretically envisage the creation of a truly free world and at the same time maintain the validity of the most fundamental assertions of Freud's theory.

According to Marcuse's reading of *Civilization and Its Discontent*, the main claim of Freud is that constraint of the instinctual structure of human beings is a precondition of progress. Unrestrained pursuit of the most immediate urges is incompatible with the condition of civilization, for the latter demands deflection from gratification as an end in itself and capacity of rechannelling the repressed biological impulses towards the goals of self-preservation and security. Freud describes the transition from the animal man - a being living under the sway of instincts - to the human being - a new creature capable of controlling his instinctual nature - in terms of the transformation of the *pleasure principle* into the *reality principle*. These two principles are related to two different dimensions of man's mental life: the pleasure principle refers to the unconscious apparatus of instinctual drives seeking immediate gratification, whereas the reality principle denotes the multiple sources of resistance to the principle of pleasure stemming from the natural and human

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[71] Cf. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, ARK Paperbacks, London, 1987, p. 5.

environment. Freud claims, in Marcuse's interpretation, that the individual, confronted in the course of his development with natural necessity, comes to realize that he cannot attain 'full and painless gratification of his desires by himself.' Hence, he 'learns to give up momentary, uncertain, and destructive pleasure for delayed, restrained, but "assured" pleasure.'[72]

The predominant reality principle does not deny the pleasure principle, but modifies and readjusts it in a manner that serves to contain the destructive import of immediate gratification and make it compatible with 'the established societal norms and relations.'[73] Yet, Marcuse contends that its advent changes not just the form and timing but the very essence of pleasure, to the extent that pleasure itself is transubstantiated:

> With the establishment of the reality principle, the human being which, under the pleasure principle, has been hardly more than a bundle of animal drives has become an organized ego. It strives for "what is useful" and what can be obtained without damage to itself and to its vital environment. Under the reality principle, the human being develops the function of *reason:* it learns to "test" the reality, to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. Man acquires the faculty of attention, memory, and judgement. He becomes a conscious thinking *subject*, geared to a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside.[74]

In Freud's psychoanalytic interpretation, the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle is a genetic-historical as well as structural process. It involves both social evolution of the species *man*, on the phylogenetic level, and the development of the individual, on the ontogenetic one:

> Phylogenetically, it occurs first in the *primal horde,* when the *primal father* monopolizes power and pleasure and enforces renunciation on the part of the sons. Ontogenetically, it occurs during the period of early childhood, and submission to the reality principle is enforced by the parents and other educators. But, both on the generic and individual level, submission is continuously reproduced. The rule of the primal father is followed, after the first rebellion, by the rule of the sons, and the brother clan develops into institutionalized social and political domination. The reality principle materializes in a system of institutions. And the individual, growing up within such a system, learns the requirements of the reality principle as those of law and order, and transmits them to the next generation.[75]

The establishment of the reality principle is never definitive but needs to be constantly reasserted. This is because the claims of the pleasure principle, assuaged or repressed during the process of civilization, survive in the subterranean and unconscious repository of mental life and from there affect the shaping of the social institutions substantiating the

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[72] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 13.
[73] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid.
[74] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 14.
[75] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 15.

reality principle. Therefore, in order for the dominion of the instinctual apparatus not to be restored, the external mechanisms of repression are repeated in the inner human nature throughout the introjection on the part of the civilized individual of the commands of his masters.

Furthermore, Freud argues that the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle represents an adaptive response to the basic survival needs. The individual, under the pressure of economic scarcity, is spurned to deflect his energies away from sexual gratification toward the working activities necessary to provide him with enough means of subsistence. In this respect, Marcuse suggests that Freud's metapsychological theory seems to reproduce the attitude of those ideologies of culture intent in seeking rational reasons for the justification of repression. Nevertheless, he believes that Freud's theory contains also elements which logically point in the direction of the possibility of a non-repressive civilization. Whereas cultural progress works relentlessly its way across history by constraining the biological urges for immediate gratification, the claims for happiness and freedom are taken up by the unconscious and brought onto the surface of conscious life in form of a memory of a lost paradise in which full satisfaction of needs is guaranteed:

> Whatever liberty exists in the realm of the developed consciousness, and in the world it has created, is only derivative, compromised freedom, gained at the expense of the full satisfaction of needs. And insofar as the full satisfaction of needs is happiness, freedom in civilization is essentially antagonistic to happiness: it involves the repressive modification (*sublimation*) of happiness. Conversely the unconscious, the deepest and oldest layer of the mental personality, is the drive for integral gratification, which is absence of want and repression. As such, it is the immediate identity of necessity and freedom. According to Freud, the equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious is upheld by the unconscious. Its truth, although repelled by consciousness, continues to haunt the mind: it preserves the memory of past stages of individual development at which integral gratification is obtained. And the past continues to claim the future: it generates the wish that the paradise be re-created on the basis of the achievements of civilization.[76]

As long as from the repository of the unconscious comes the call for reviving the promises of freedom and happiness, Marcuse claims that the regressive aspects of civilization can be turned into a progressive function. He believes that this hope is kept alive by Freud's theory itself, despite its stating that a non-repressive civilization is impossible. After all, he remarks, Freud was not a romantic or utopian who turned nostalgically to "the past" - the past stages of individual development and human evolution - in order to seek compensation for the misery of the present, but used the inner connection of civilization

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[76] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 18.

and barbarism both to denounce the suffering implicit in the implementation of progress and to reorient it toward the goal of a future liberation.

Following Freud, Marcuse acknowledges that repression is a condition of civilization. Moreover, he describes as privilege and distinction of man the historical circumstance that, with the transition from the human animal to the *animal sapiens,* the containment of instinctual drives has intensified gratification. He points out that man, by breaking the compulsion of nature, has transformed 'the blind necessity of the fulfilment of want into desired gratification',[77] thus making available for himself refined and mature pleasure. Against Freud, however, Marcuse contends that it is because of specific interests of domination and not because of material scarcity that the process of civilization has taken on in the course of history certain institutional forms of control whose implementation demands additional repression to that enforced by objective scarcity of means. According to Marcuse, in modern industrial society domination has developed to such a level of distortion that sublimated desire for cultural emancipation and spiritual growth has been perverted into an ossified activity of coordination of the individual with the whole. If not arrested, this downward dynamic of alienation will lead the process of civilization to inevitable self-destruction. To be sure, he concedes that Freud anticipated the fatality of this dynamic. Freud explained the historical transformation of humanity in terms of an antagonism between two primary instincts, the life instinct, or *eros*, and the death instinct, or *thanatos*. Eros presides over the instinctual tendency of the organism to secure its preservation and prevent its premature return to inorganic existence; thanatos, instead, impels the organism to retrieve the lost state of peace and harmony which was characteristic of life in the womb and was broken with its coming into existence.

Originally, Eros and Thanatos were fused together in the Nirvana-like condition of life within the womb. This "oceanic unity" was broken, on the phylogenetic level, when the first human group - the primal horde - was established under the rule of the father. Since then, a relentless war was waged against him by his "sons" in order to recapture the desired woman - that is, the wife of the father - and restore the previous state of integral peace and absence of need, pain, and desire. The father, with his despotic rule, was eventually defeated by the rebellious sons. Yet, the latter, haunted by a feeling of guilt for the killing, did not resume the longed-for harmony of the womb-like existence but reinforced the process of civilization by substituting for the tyrannical authoritarianism of the father an apparatus of legal restrictions, administrative regulations, and moral codes.

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[77] Cf. H Marcuse, ibid., p. 38.

As a result of this self-inhibition, they began to feel doubly guilty: guilty for killing the father and guilty for betraying the cause of the revolt against domination.

According to Freud, the aggressive impulse to repeat the crime against the new forms of domination has never been totally subdued. However, as he clarifies, civilization has warded off all threats arising from the destructive tendencies of this impulse by diverting the death instinct towards mastery of nature and technological betterment. Seen in this light, the entire process of civilization has been rendered possible by the sublimation of the destructive instincts into meaningful work. Indeed, the "irrationality" of the repression of the instinctual constellation of man is for Freud at the very basis of the supreme rationality of civilization, and, as long as domination is the only effective means for preventing the death trends from sweeping away the cultural work of eros, he believes that its rational justification is granted. The problem for him is rather that the sublimated diversions of the aggressive impulses induce in the individual excessive pain which, with the further progression of civilization, could increase to such a degree to become unbearable. In a certain sense, Freud assumes that both the life and the death instinct contain in themselves a regressive dynamic. Both aim at restoring the condition of pleasure and integral fulfilment of an archaic time. The only difference between them is that, whereas the latter longs for immediate gratification, thus putting constantly the life of the organism into risk, the former defers the death of the organism by developing a form of rational behaviour which allows it to be secured a lasting satisfaction of its needs. This means that, contrary to its appearance, the journey of life across its sublimated constructions is 'really one long detour to death.'[78]

At first glance, Marcuse seems to reject the gloomy picture of the process of civilization that Freud depicts. He notices that the sublimated diversions of exploitation of nature and technological rationality appear to have subdued the aggressive impulses and furthered the work of Eros. Yet, he cannot help but emphasizing that destruction, though diverted from the ego to nature and to the external world of other human beings, remains destruction, thus aiming at unrestrained fulfilment:

> While the destructive impulses are thus being satisfied [in the modified and sublimated diversions of civilization], such satisfaction cannot stabilize their energy in the service of Eros. Their destructive force must drive them beyond this servitude and sublimation, for their aim is, not matter, not nature, not any object, but life itself. If they are the derivatives of the death instinct, then they cannot accept as final any "substitutes". Then, through constructive

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[78] This quotation from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* appears in H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, cit., p. 26.

technological destruction, through the constructive violation of nature, the instincts would still operate toward the annihilation of life. The radical hypothesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* would stand: the instincts of self-preservation, self assertion, and mastery, insofar as they have absorbed this destructiveness, would have the function of assuring the organism's "own path to death." Freud retracted this hypothesis as soon as he had advanced it, but its formulations in *Civilization and Its Discontents* seem to restore its essential content. And the fact that the destruction of life (human and animal) has progressed with the progress of civilization, that cruelty and hatred and the scientific extermination of men have increased in relation to the real possibility of elimination of oppression - this feature of late industrial civilization would have instinctual roots which perpetuate destructiveness beyond all rationality. The growing mastery of nature then would, with the growing productivity of labor, develop and fulfil the human needs *only as a by-product*: increasing cultural wealth and knowledge provide the material for progressive destruction and the need for increasing instinctual repression.[79]

Marcuse acknowledges that the dialectic of civilization results in the triumph of the death instinct but insists that this self-destructive dynamic has been impressed upon the work of culture by the historical accomodation of the institutional structures to the interests of domination. In line with Freud's metapsychology, he maintains also that the instinctual source of civilization resides in the erotic impulse 'to preserve and enrich life by mastering nature in accordance with the developing vital needs.'[80] Striving for pleasure, not for security, he observes, is originally the aim of human existence. Although civilization demands repression of sexuality as the very life force, this repressive utilization of instinctual energy is still directed towards the enhancement of life. The problem with civilization is instead that, throughout its development, the erotic basis of the achievements of culture has been transformed. The logic of domination, whose rationale originally lay in the instrumental value of serving the needs of life, has become an end in itself. Rationalization and mechanization of labor, rather than being used to minimize the time necessary for the procurement of the goods necessary for survivaland to encourage a qualitative change in the present costellation of man's needs so as to enable him to develop a higher spectrum of interests beyond the realm of necessity, have been turned into sources of further alienation. The more the progress of civilization has disclosed 'the real possibility of liberating the individual from the constraints once justified by scarcity and immaturity',[81] the more the individual has been forced into an impersonal system of functions and relations which obey exclusevely to the purpose of fostering domination in society.

The present configuration of instincts is for Marcuse a historical development only partially determined by the struggle for existence. The repressive control of the libido

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[79] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., pp. 86-87.
[80] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p, 125.
[81] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 93.

through institutionalization and internalization has been enforced mainly in order to preserve the oppressive organization of society. Consequently, there is no destructive or asocial force inherent in the very essence of instincts that necessitates repressive constraint. The nature of instincts is historically acquired and lends itself to modifications and transformations in accordance with the transformations of the conditions of civilization. The intent of Marcuse's project is precisely theoretically to examine the hypothesis of a non-repressive civilization based upon a non-repressive development of the libido and to contemplate the possibility of consciousness to be released from the limitations of the reality principle and taken closer to the fulfilments of the pleasure principle. However, this reconciliation between the pleasure principle and the reality principle is not meant to be oriented retrospectively towards a subhistorical and subhuman past sunk into the depths of an ideal state of nature, but refers to a future, utopian state of humanity envisaged to emerge 'with the progress of conscious rationality' at the point of 'the highest maturity of civilization.'[82] Marcuse imagines that technological progress will bring about a general automatization of labor which will make possible 'reduction of labor time to a minimum' and 'exchangeability of functions.'[83] Overcoming of scarcity and rational distribution of resources will enable men to satisfy their basic needs without the fatigue of work. Of course, the necessity of labor cannot be totally eliminated as long as material and intellectual production are a prerequisite for gratification. Nevertheless, the reorientation of industrial civilization in the direction of loosening the imperative of productivity would unleash for Marcuse a different instinctual dynamic bound to disclose an unexplored realm of freedom:

> The utopian claims of imagination have become saturated with historical reality. If the achievements of the performance principle [that is, the historically determined perversion of the reality principle by surplus-repression and alienated labor] surpass its institutions, they also militate against the direction of its productivity - against the subjugation of man to his labor. Freed from this enslavement, productivity loses its repressive power and impels the free development of individual needs. Such a change in the direction of progress goes beyond the fundamental reorganization of social labor which it presupposes. No matter how justly and rationally the material production may be organized, it never can be a realm of freedom and gratification; but it can release time and energy for the free play of human faculties *outside* the realm of alienated labor. The more complete the alienation of labor, the greater the potential of freedom: total automation would be the optimum. It is the sphere outside labor which defines freedom and fulfilment, and it is the definition of the human existence in terms of this sphere which constitutes the negation of the performance principle. This negation cancels the rationality of domination and consciously "de-realizes" the world shaped by this rationality - redefining it by the rationality of gratification. While such a historical turn in the direction of progress is rendered possible only on the basis of the achievements

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[82] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 150.
[83] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 152.

> of the performance principle and of its potentialities, it transforms the human existence in its entirety, including the work world and the struggle with nature. Progress beyond the performance principle is not promoted through improving or supplementing the present existence by more contemplation, more leisure, through advertising and practising the "higher values", through elevating oneself and one's life. Such ideas belong to the cultural household of the performance principle itself. The lamentation about the degrading effect of "total work", the exhortation to appreciate the good and beautiful things in this world and in the world hereafter, is itself repressive insofar as it reconciles man with the work world which it leaves untouched on the side and below. Moreover, it sustains repression by diverting the effort from the very sphere in which repression is rooted and perpetuated.[84]

Marcuse offers also quite a detailed description of what the new world beyond want and external compulsion would look like. However, contrary to his announced utopian program orientated towards the future, he draws upon the archetypes of Orpheus and Narcissus - two mythological images symbolizing an order in which man and nature live in harmony - to characterize a realm of freedom in which the mechanical structures of bureaucracy and the alienated conditions of labor crippling the realm of necessity are replaced respectively by ordered forms of beauty and "free play" with reality. The combination of these two elements of beauty and imaginative play compounded with the conquest of time - another mythical residuum symbolized by Orpheus and Narcissus whose images represent also man's rebellion against the passage of time as well as the desire for lasting gratification - make up what appears to be a form of aesthetic liberation. Man, split by the progress of civilization between an order of consciousness and an order of reason perennially in conflict with each other, should, Marcuse claims, reconstitute the unity of his being by giving free rein to a basic impulse underlying the faculty of imagination, namely the play impulse, and by endowing it with the aesthetic function of reconciling feelings and affections with the ideas of reason.[85]

In the process of bringing together reason and sensuousness, these two mental processes do not remain the same. The free activity of the play impulse not only emancipates the individual from the values of productivity and performance, but also effects an operation of desublimation of reason whereby the highest and most sublime values preached by civilization are depreciated in favour of a maturation and promotion to culture of the manifestations of the lower faculties. This debasement of the elevated products of reason does not bring about, though, a relapse into barbarism since it is designed to occur at the culmination of civilization under conditions of abundance and superfluity. Given that all products of reason are epiphenomena of the realm of necessity, Marcuse assumes that they carry with them the repressive traits of their origin. Therefore,

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[84] Cf. H Marcuse, ibid., pp. 156-57.
[85] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 182.

freedom is possible only outside the structures of reason and of the world it conceptualizes. No matter how rationally it may be organized, 'the realm of labor is one of unfreedom because the human existence in this realm is determined by objectives and functions that are not its own and that do not allow the free play of human faculties and desires.'[86] Hence, once removed from their aloofness in a platonic realm of perfection, the ideals of reason can be taken back 'into the organic structure of human existence from which they were separated',[87] thus allowing the potentialities of man to freely develop in harmony with nature.

This realm of aesthetic imagination into which Marcuse retreats constitutes the extreme refuge for the critical and dialectical reason that modern technological society suppresses. However, although he grounds his project of human liberation upon an immanent critique of the present material conditions and envisages a technological rationality capable of reviving the Greek concept of *techne* as the art of living well in view of individual and societal happiness, his *biological* account of the possibility of an "orphic and narcissistic life" seems to be untenable. In fact, given the manipulative use to which in advanced capitalist society consciousness is subjected, when it comes to determining its own desires the instinctual sphere of human nature cannot provide an ultimate criterion to distinguish true from false needs - that is, needs superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests. The rationale to which consciousness is urged to appeal in Marcuse's critical approach does not go beyond subjective feelings attesting to potentialities of pleasure and gratification. These, however, are highly suspect and defy objective standards of evaluation.[88] To be sure, Marcuse maintains that the sublimated products of culture and art unfold an emancipatory dynamic, for they articulate a life of harmony and fulfilment which extends the principle of pleasure 'beyond the narrow compass of genital sexuality'.[89] In this respect, the path of human liberation he contrives evokes the itinerary of the Hegelian consciousness which begins, too, with a *desire* for self-recognition *via* negation of the other to culminate in a transparent unity with it. Nevertheless, Marcuse deviates from Hegel in conceiving the attainment of freedom not as a spiritual event which ultimately resides in the idea but as an act of subversion which remains bound to the level of organic and instinctual satisfaction. Hegel, as Marcuse himself shows, 'replaces the idea of progress by that of a cyclical development which

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[86] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 195.
[87] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 196.
[88] Cf. D. Ingram, *Critical Theory and Philosophy*, Paragon House, New York, 1990, p. 103.
[89] Cf. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, cit., p. 82.

moves, self-sufficient, in the reproduction and consummation of what is.'[90] When consciousness ceases its activities of conquest, it comes to rest by fulfilling its being in the conprehension of its history and recollection of the past. Its end, therefore, is not mere gratification but absolute knowledge. On the contrary, Marcuse conceives of a pattern of striving for pleasure which projects humanity from the realm of necessity onto the realm of freedom, but he describes this trajectory of enrichment of life as the transformation of a purely redundant erotic instinct. Unfortunately, this adherence to a modern version of essentialism makes his whole project appear as the call for a return to an archaic beginning where life is lived in peace and harmony with nature. Thus, renouncement of linear time comes once again to coincide with the myth of the eternal return of the same.

VI. Conclusion

To the dilemmas facing Critical Theory before the expansion of the process of rationalization to all spheres of life, there are two answers: one pertains to Adorno and claims that the ultimate norms for human liberation are to be searched for in art and philosophy, or, more correctly, in those crevices of these two activities which remained refractory to mass-manipulation. The other belongs to the Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization* and sees in the instinctual configuration of human subjectivity the lever for overturning the structures of domination of society. I have argued that Marcuse's appeal to a permanent feature of organic life reproduces a form of essentialism which is vulnerable to Adorno's suspicion of onesided validity claims transcending the critical scrutiny of negative dialectic. Truth outside a contextual particularity is for Adorno an ideological hypostatazation whose false and mythical elements must be unmasked by philosophy. According to him, an object, in order to be meaningful, must be related to the totality in which it is inserted. Nevertheless, the mediation between the universal and the particular is never definitive. Adorno' s negative dialectic requires that the non-identical be constantly redefined.

But the account of Adorno's theory given in this chapter has come to discern in the method of negative dialectic a not entirely satisfying device for dealing with the question of progress. If one wants to elude the aporias impinging upon both the linear and the circular views of historical time - that is, the positive and negative philosophies of history -

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[90] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 117.

I have shown that Adorno's "technique" of determinate negation offers a paradoxical and, in some respects, not ineffective solution. It abstains from postulating a definition of what progress ought to be like but, at the same time, does not abdicate the critical stance of reflecting upon the actual historical unfolding of it. At this point, the problem confronting Adorno's dialectical approach to the question of progress is: from where does reflection about the nature of our civilization draw the principles of its critique? Adorno's radicalization of instrumental reason prompts him to hypostatize a realm of aesthetic reconciliation from whose vantage point the attack against the contradictions of the world is mounted. This retreat into the truth of art seems however to have no legitimation. Indeed, it cannot have one unless philosophy provides it with an ultimate meaning. Otherwise, how could art conduct the activity of determinate negation without making use of a mode of discursive knowledge? [91]

To be sure, Adorno himself recognizes the necessity of mediating art with conceptual thought when he claims that 'aesthetic experience must pass over into philosophy or else it will not be genuine'[92]. But a transition from the realm of aesthetic-intuitive reconciliation to that of discoursive philosophical engagement is also demanded by the very nature of the question of progress. Progress is in fact not an abstract concept but a historical and anthropological phenomenon situated in the totality of human relations. Whoever sets out to come to terms with it cannot avoid the confrontation with the dilemma of how to bind its historical evolution to a system of rationally grounded norms.

To philosophy and the inescapable dilemmas of its discourse I turn in the next and final chapter. There, I will draw a different picture of Marcuse from the one offered so far and suggest a materialist-dialectical version of 'essentialism' accounting for the theory of technological progress.

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[91] Cf. L. Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of an Illusion*, MIT Press, 1991, p. 188.

[92] Cf. T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Routledge, London, p. 190.

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THE EMPYREAN HEIGHTS OF TECHNOLOGY

Beyond Habermas towards Marcuse:

A Critical Framework for Technological Progress

I. Introduction

If Heidegger is right in his reading of Western civilization, we live in an epoch dominated by technology. This claim is not innocuous. It does not merely say that technology is an aspect, even the prevailing one, of the contemporary world. Rather, it implies that in the technological phenomenon an entire history, namely, the history of metaphysics and of the forgetfulness of Being, comes to its logical conclusion. In other terms, it says that in the technological world of late modernity culminates a historical totality and, as a result, the whole culture is penetrated by technical modes of thought.

There are two lines of argument running against this Heideggerean substantive conception of the universality of technology: one asserts that technology is neutral and that machines are mere tools that we can use for different purposes; the other recognizes instead the fundamental bias of technology towards domination of man and nature, but asserts also that it is possible to transcend its repressive clutches into a higher, humanized technological universe.

The first line of argument is held, among others, by Habermas who believes that there is nothing wrong with technology as such. According to him, the problem with technological modernization resides in the spread of instrumental and purposive rationality - a category into which he lumps technical practices - to all spheres of life. He warns that, as long as the imperatives of technical reason encroach upon the lifeworld, they tend to delegitimize genuine practical or political questions and take over the specific forms of rationality regulating our everyday communicative practices.

The second line of argument is held instead by Marcuse. He directs his critical attack not just against technology, but against scientific and technical reason. He claims that machines are in their very structure penetrated by the dominant values of industrial society.

This bias, in his view, is not a contingent accident of a repressive application of fundamentally neutral raw materials, but is inscribed in the nature of formal thinking.

The consequences of this thesis are devastating. On the one hand, it implies the assertion that the world has become one-dimensional and that there is no place for critical consciousness. On the other hand, it suggests that, insofar as there is room for critique, the present technological reality can be transcended only by abandoning science.

In this paper, I confront the implications of these two lines of argument. In section II, I begin with a presentation of Habermas's theory of modernity as the emergence of the conflicting spheres of instrumental and communicative rationality. Then, in section III, I test his theory to the issue of technological progress. By using a recent book of Simpson which devises a theory of technology within a quasi-Habermasian framework, I argue that, as long as this framework confines technology to the domain of instrumental and purposive rationality, it is untenable.

My thesis is that technology is value-laden. In advanced industrial society it is biased towards domination, but in a free society it can be bent to serve different, alternative purposes. In order to support my claim in favour of the liberating and emancipatory potential of technology, I rely in section IV upon Marcuse's analysis of technological rationality. By drawing upon Feenberg's interpretation of Marcuse, I argue that his dialectical conception of reality offers a valid framework to edify a new technological society based upon the values of freedom, justice, equality, happiness and beauty. The accomplishment of this utopian project does not require us to relinquish science and reason. The story of the transformation of technology is different from the story of the transformation of science, and these two domains can and must be maintained distinct.

II. Communicative Reason versus Instrumental Reason: Habermas's Theory of Progress

One of the cornerstones of Habermas's philosophical reflection on Critical Theory can be identified in the claim that Adorno's and Horkheimer's dialectic of Enlightenment stands impotent before the regressive and nihilistic tendencies of modernity. He contends that the tool of negative dialectic, though apparently effective as a critical yardstick by which to evaluate the historical process of rationalization, fails to ground itself on a normative foundation, thus resulting in self-contradiction. Habermas also points out that the

methodological process of determinate negation refers to a conceptual framework of the philosophy of history which is based upon dubious assumptions about the future outcome of history. Even supposing, as the Hegelian-Marxist model does, that the normative standards against which the present conditions of society are measured are immanent in the historical process, their validity can be claimed only under the hypothetical proviso that the meaning of history is successfully realized in the future.

Against the theoretical illusions associated with the philosophy of history, Habermas offers a critical paradigm of understanding social meaning which combines hermeneutic interpretation with the empiric-analytical procedures of the natural sciences. Besides, he traces these two modes of research back to a reflective power of human rationality to produce uncoerced consensus in a process of domination-free discussion. According to Habermas, the human species is oriented in the course of its evolution towards the acquisition of a reflective capacity to overcome disagreement through a process of intersubjective dialogue. The thesis of Habermas is that the legacy of the Enlightenment is not exhausted by the affirmation of instrumental and purposive rationality but includes also a dimension of communicative rationality in which issues of practical life are intersubjectively debated. He argues that, in the modern world dominated by technological progress and maximization of efficiency, questions concerning the nature of the good life are increasingly taken away from the context of communicative disputation and brought under the management of an apparatus of experts where they become *technical* questions concerning the most efficient means for the achievement of an end. Given these premises, the challenge facing the legacy of the Enlightenment consists for Habermas in finding ways to preserve a space for intersubjective dialogue against the encroachment of instrumental imperatives.

To be sure, Habermas is not opposed to conceptualizing certain aspects of society in system-theoretic terms - that is, in terms of a whole articulated into a plurality of elements whose functional relations guarantee the stability of the whole - but maintains that the intersubjective dimension of the lifeworld cannot be totally objectified into an alienated system. In fact, were the process of system integration succeeding in absorbing the realm of intersubjective communication, the latter would be reduced to a structure of practices operating as self-regulating mechanisms independent from any subjective determination. Accordingly, Habermas is encouraged to believe that, insofar as the primary level of the lifeworld is preserved as a source of meaning from the assault of system theory, it provides

a model of rationality alternative to the dominant instrumental one.

To this purpose, Habermas redefines the concept of progress in terms which, though avoiding the unilinear and necessary implications of the Hegelian philosophy of history, retain the principle of evolutive linearity. He argues that there are different levels of historical change and that it is mistaken to see instrumental rationality as a totalizing category of the historical process. In fact, whereas on the systemic level instrumental and formal rationality tends to expand and colonize increasing spheres of social life, on the level of communicative interaction counterforces operate to imprint upon history alternative developmental tendencies. However, Habermas rejects the historical materialist model of species history which assumes the existence of a macro subject - that is, the species subject - undergoing evolution and identifies in societies the bearers of evolution. He points out that social evolution occurs in world history as a process of replacing certain social structures by more comprehensive ones 'in accord with a pattern that is to be rationally reconstructed.'[1] This denial of a macro subject in history, though, does not prevent him from extending to the phylogenetic level of the species the process of individual cognitive maturation occurring at the ontogenetic level. Rather, Habermas argues that the species as such learns at both the instrumental and moral level, and that the historical process in which this formative advance takes place follows a developmental logic. This logic of instrumental and moral development does not unfold along the trajectory of a necessary pattern. Habermas denies the possibility for historical knowledge to anticipate the totality of future events. History, he claims, is a narrative reconstruction of events occurred in the past and does not lend itself to prognostic speculation. Its task is limited to explaining factual processes as actualizations of structurally open possibilities. These possibilities, in turn, may be progressive or regressive. There is no guarantee that the species will follow the progressive pattern of action. Yet, once at a given stage of the evolutionary process a certain path is taken, the structural sequences arising from that course are irreversible.

In a challenge to the nihilism of Max Weber, Habermas argues that modernity is an uncompleted project whose prospects of fulfilment are still open. In his view, modernization is more than the process of increasing expansion of instrumental rationality.

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[1] Cf. M. Jay, "Jurgen Habermas and the Reconstruction of Marxist Holism", in *Marxism and Totality*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 488; plus J. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Heinemann, London, p. 140.

He contends that an emancipatory progression can be discerned in the development of the modern world which proceeds from 'the ritual practices of sacred cults to the symmetrical social interaction' of communicative rationality.[2] The worldviews of the earliest communities were based upon a form of 'totalistic mythic thinking'[3] whose normative foundations eluded reflective legitimation. As universal consensus on the ethical standards was guaranteed by the authority of a unified collective consciousness, social practices remained unexamined. However, the disenchantment of this sacredly grounded moral and cognitive order has unleashed a kaleidoscope of alternative worldviews for whose decision-making processes rational procedures of communicative interaction are required. Consequently, as the attainment of normative agreement becomes increasingly necessary, practices of communicative rationality widen so as to enact a collective learning process to which the species submits itself.

This evolution from the pre-rational religious worldviews to the differentiation of the sphere of the communicatively mediated lifeworld is for Habermas a legitimate achievement of modernity. If it is true that, from within this type of rationality oriented towards normative agreement a more instrumental rationality has developed which threatens to colonize the lifeworld itself, Habermas underlines the capacity of resistance of the rationalized lifeworld against its systemic integration. The struggle over which type of rationality should prevail is not yet over and Habermas undertakes the task of rescuing 'the critical potential for completing the project of modernization'.[4] Indeed, he does not envisage a sweeping triumph of communicative upon instrumental rationality, but argues for a mediated relation between them. Although he is aware that their antagonism will never be overcome into a 'harmonious normative totality',[5] he believes that functional procedures of rationalization can be effectively used to increase the emancipatory potential of the discursive dimension of the lifeworld. Seen in this light, the mediation between the system and social integration does not resume, as Martin Jay points out, the Hegelian concept of totality:

> Habermas's attempt to reconstruct the Western Marxist concept of totality was... limited. The

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[2] Cf. M. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, cit., p. 503.

[3] Cf. M. Jay, ibid., p. 505.

[4] Cf. M. Jay, ibid. p. 507.

[5] Cf. M. Jay, ibid., p. 506.

> latitudinal alternative he posited [that is, the alternative between system and social integration] was based on a decentred rather than expressive holism. System and social integration, functional and communicative rationalization were related, but not reducible to a higher type of integrative unity. The differentiation produced by modernization could not be undone and indeed, in important ways, ought not to be. Longitudinal totality meant a reconstructed evolutionary process of learning skills in several areas, but one that could be validated only through a highly uncertain discursive process of will formation. Normative totality meant the achievement (or near achievement) of an ideal speech situation grounded in the institutional framework of a new public sphere where generalizable interests would be discursively articulated. But there would always be a residual antagonism between man and nature that would defy full totalization in discursive terms.[6]

To summarize: Habermas identifies in the subjection of increasing domains of communicative interaction to formal regulations and systemic imperatives the danger that modern societies face. He asserts that the one-sided rationalization of economic and administrative systems encroaches upon the lifeworld so as to undermine the processes of social integration, cultural reproduction, and socialization through which the lifeworld reproduces itself. When the abstract mechanisms of functional rationality creep into the lifeworld, the processes of mutual understanding and coordination of action orientations whereby consensus is generated are bypassed, thus enabling an elite of 'functionaries and experts trained to obey'[7] to take the place of social actors.

The lifeworld is the domain of values and norms. If consensus upon them breaks down, it provides from within itself discursive procedures to reestablish agreement. The argumentative renegotiation of the norms and values upon which new modes of social organization are forged occurs through a process of reinterpretation of needs and interests. These, for Habermas, are not givens, something imprinted upon human nature from the very beginning and therefore immutable. Rather, they can be discussed in a process of dialogic exchange so as to be redeemed from the sheer particularity of their original shape and become generalizable. Habermas's notion of rationalization of the lifeworld as opposed to systemic rationalization refers precisely to the differentiation of practices of consensus oriented communication within the dimension of social life. Technical solutions to problems arising in this sphere short-circuit the very practical character of those problems. They are imposed from outside and do not take into account the developmental nature of human life in the domain of *praxis*. From their systemic perspective, functional orientations elude the interpretive process through which social practices unfold and

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[6] Cf. M. Jay, ibid., p. 507.
[7] Cf. S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 229.

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from technical mediation ends up reproducing the same instrumental paradigm against which it purports to intervene:

> If we choose to leave something untouched by technology, is that not a subtler kind of technical determination? Have I not domesticated a wild tree or bush if I plant around it in such a way as to bring out its beauty? (This is a standard technique of Japanese gardening). If I suddenly need meaning in my overly technologized life and obtain it by returning to my family's religious traditions, am I not *using* tradition as a kind of supertechnology? If so, how can I believe in it? How can I ever leave the technical sphere if the very act of bounding a reservation instrumentalizes it?[28]

In order to support my claim in favour of the existence of a liberating potential in technology, I will draw upon Marcuse's critical theory of post-industrial civilization. At first sight, it might appear as a bizarre choice for my advocacy of the capacity of technology to bring about qualitative changes in society to make recourse to a thinker who is known to be the bearer of strong critical claims against technological civilization. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse launches a fierce attack not just against the use to which technology is put today, but against technology and technological reason *as such.* He rejects the notion of the neutrality of technology - that is, the idea that technology is indifferent to the variety of purposes it is bent to serve - and states that in the advanced industrial society technology has become an ideology. From his line of argument, it emerges that the technological universe represents the moment of synthesis of the historical project of subjugation of man and nature. Hence, as a part of a system of domination, technological rationalization takes on political connotations which, according to him, are inscribed deep down 'in the concept and construction of techniques.'[29]

Yet, from this radical critique of technology, Marcuse, like Adorno and Horkheimer before him, is not led to call for a romantic and irrationalist return to a pre-technological form of life. He maintains that technology, despite its ideological character, is still the most effective means available for man to be released from toil and misery, satisfy his needs, and develop his intellectual faculties. As a result, he argues that the technological reality of domination of nature, exploitation of human resources, and social authoritarianism can be transcended only by completing the technological project:

> If the completion of the technological project involves a break with the prevailing

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[28] Cf. A. Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, ibid., p. 10.

[29] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Routledge, London, 1964, Introduction, p. XVI.

> technological rationality, the break in turn depends on the continued existence of the technical base itself. For it is this base which has rendered possible the satisfaction of needs and the reduction of toil - it remains the very base of all forms of human freedom. The qualitative change rather lies in the reconstruction of this base - that is, in its development with a view of different ends.[30]

Now, on the basis of this claim, how is it possible to reconcile the view that technological rationality is in its own logic politically and ideologically biased towards domination with the utopian idea of transcending the technological reality of domination into a higher, humanized technological world? Whether Marcuse succeeds in resolving this dilemma is still an open question in the philosophical literature.[31] Nevertheless, no one can deny Marcuse's intent to articulate the promise of a disalienated technological civilization by moving from the Heideggerean position that technological rationality is a priori biased towards domination. Since I take this attempt seriously, I want to follow Marcuse's line of reasoning up to its ultimate consequences so as to assess its viability for my purposes of human liberation.

From the passage quoted above, it seems that Marcuse envisages the possibility of reconstructing existing technology and make it serve new ends in the context of a radical transformation of society. For such a possibility to be actualized, however, a conception of the neutrality of technology must be maintained at some level. In fact, the technical resources can unleash their liberating potential only if there is in their structure an essentially neutral core which can be abstracted from the substantive values they incorporate in their concrete historical applications. However, were such a core to be found, the contradiction between the affirmation that technology is a priori value-laden and the faith in the possibility of conferring a new direction upon technological progress would simply be shifted onto a different ground. Marcuse would in fact be facing the dilemma of holding two incompatible positions: the position that technology is biased towards

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[30] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 231. This passage is also quoted by Andrew Feenberg to whom I am totally indebted for my interpretation of Marcuse. See A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", in R. Pippin, A. Feenberg, and C. P. Webel (eds.), *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, London, 1988, pp. 225-256, p. 227.

[31] On Marcuse's one-dimensionality thesis an opposite interpretation to that given by Feenberg is offered, among others, by Claus Offe in "Technology and One-Dimensionality: A Version of the Technocracy Thesis?", in R. Pippin, A. Feenberg, and C. P. Webel (eds.), *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, cit., pp. 215-225.

domination and the position that it is neutral and value-free. Now, Feenberg claims that 'neutrality and bias can and do in fact coexist and that Marcuse's theory rests on the possibility of their coexistence.'[32] He distinguishes between two kinds of bias: substantive and formal bias. Substantive bias occurs when different standards are applied to individuals who ought to be treated equally. Formal bias arises instead when individuals are judged by the same standards but in a context in which some benefit from the apparent fairness of the procedural arrangements and others are disadvantaged.

Feenberg argues that Marcuse's critique of technological rationality implies the assumption that technology is formally biased. In his view, Marcuse recognizes the fundamental neutrality, if not of technology, of the technological elements out of which technologies are built up. These elements such as the hammer, the lever, or the electric circuit are in themselves indifferent to the ends they are contingently made to serve in particular social and cultural settings. 'They are', Feenberg says, 'like the vocabulary of a language: they can be strung together to form a variety of "sentences" with different meanings and intentions'.[33] The bias arises precisely when these elements are combined and arranged in a concrete form. Therefore, if we define technologies as 'developed ensembles of technical elements', Feenberg continues, it can be stated that 'they are greater than the sum of their parts. They meet social criteria of purposes in the very selection and arrangement of the intrinsically neutral elements from which they are built. These social purposes can be understood as "embodied" in the technology and not simply as an extrinsic use to which a neutral tool might be put.'[34]

Following the interpretation of Feenberg, it is possible to draw the conclusion that, according to Marcuse, the neutrality of technology can be preserved to the extent that contextual considerations are not taken into account. In a decontextualized, abstract analysis the illusion arises that technology is value-free. But, in fact, this analysis confounds the neutral status of the technical elements with the value-laden substance of the technological combinations. The strategy of Marcuse is therefore to bring into consideration the larger, concrete social context within which the formally neutral technical materials are arranged and imagine new ways of combining them according to a different

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[32] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", cit., p. 230.
[33] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", ibid., p. 233.
[34] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", ibid., p. 233.

system of values.

Yet, there is a more radical thesis that Marcuse puts forward in *One-Dimensional Man.* It asserts that even the formally neutral elements from which technologies are built up are intrinsically biased because they are penetrated by the values embodying scientific-technical knowledge. The consequences of this thesis are devastating for his purposes of transcending the actual technological reality into a humanized one, for it shifts the object of critique from technology to technical reason. The implication is that scientific-technical reason emerges to be biased towards domination. In other terms, Marcuse comes as far as to claim that there is something intrinsic to formally neutral systems that bends them in the direction of distorted, repressive applications.

Marcuse's demonstration of the formal bias of technical reason and, more generally, of abstract thinking is based upon his dialectical ontology as well as a Hegelian understanding of the categories of "abstract" and "concrete", "universal" and "particular", "concept" and "idea". He points out that formal thinking tends artificially to isolate the object from the whole to which it properly belongs, thus suppressing the practical and dialectical mediation through which the potentialities of the object are uncovered. In so doing, formal thinking loses the essential connection of the object to its context and realizes a truth which refers exclusively to an abstract universe of fixed and frozen concepts 'available for manipulation from without.'[35] But as soon as these conceptual constructions are reintegrated to the concrete, historical totality, the formal bias emerges. In fact, as a result of the suppression of the possibilities of a higher, progressive development immanently present in the object, the latter is adapted to what merely is. Hence, the theoretical propositions stemming from the abstractive process, though neutral in that 'they do not prescribe the ends of the object they construct conceptually', are not neutral 'with respect to the alternative of actual and potential in [their] objects'. Given that they have done away with the dialectical concept of potentiality, they are 'clearly biased towards the actual.'[36]

There is no such a thing, for Marcuse, as the object of immediate experience abstracted from the conceptual process through which it is grasped. Rather, the truth of the object lies in its concept whereby it is put in relation with the historical totality and made

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[35] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", ibid., p. 247.
[36] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", ibid., p. 246-247.

recognizable as that which it really is. What the object really is not exhausted by what it actually is, but includes the potentialities to which it points by virtue of an inner tension. As a matter of fact, then, the object tends to deny what it immediately is and transcend itself 'towards its reality'.[37]

Insofar as formal thinking ignores the dynamic and dialectical content of our conceptual experience, its operational procedures assume a political function.[38] To emphasize this point, Marcuse brings up the case of a study into labour relations in an American company in the 1950s conducted by social researchers. This case is illuminating of the discriminatory social outcome that empiricist methodology generates when applied to social theory. Here is Marcuse's account of the results of the study:

> In investigating the workers' complaints about working conditions and wages, the researchers hit upon the fact that most of the complaints were formulated in statements which contained "vague, indefinite terms", lacked the "objective reference" to "standards which are generally accepted", and had characteristics "essentially different from the properties generally associated with common facts". In other words, the complaints were formulated in such general statements as "the washrooms are unsanitary", "the job is dangerous", "rates are too low".
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> Guided by the principle of operational thinking, the researchers set out to translate or reformulate those statements in such a manner that their vague generality could be reduced to particular referents, terms designating the particular situation in which the complaints originated and thus picturing "accurately the conditions in the company". ...
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> For example, the statement "the washrooms are unsanitary" was translated into "on such and such occasion I went into this washroom, and the washbowl had some dirt in it." Inquiries then ascertained that this was "largely due to the carelessness of some employees", a campaign against throwing papers, spitting on the floor, and similar practices was instituted, and an attendant was assigned to constant duty in the washrooms. It was in this way that many of the complaints were re-interpreted and used to effect improvements.[39]

What is wrong with this study? The reply of Marcuse is that, insofar as this kind of operational thinking contributes to alleviating human suffering, it fulfils a progressive function in the material and intellectual advance of society. Yet, he underlines, it 'also testifies to the ambivalent rationality of progress.'[40] The aim of the study is, after all, to assuage the discontent of the workers by making it something tractable in functional and operational terms. But, as a result of the manipulative act of translation carried out by the researchers, the meaning and content of the original universal propositions of the workers

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[37] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., pp. 105-106.
[38] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 107.
[39] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 109.
[40] Cf. H Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 114.

are significantly transformed. Whereas the untranslated statements express a universal state of affairs by relating the particular conditions of the workers to the larger social and political context outside the workplace, in the translation the link between the particular and the whole is cut off. As a consequence, the discontent of the workers appears as a matter of personal, contingent distress to be treated through the functional measures devised by sociology and psychology while the general mood of unhappiness pervading the whole of society goes lost.

In this light, which set of propositions captures and recognizes better the reality of the workers for what it truly is? The "vague, indefinite, universal" propositions of the workers or their operational translations? Paradoxically, what appears to be a concrete, detailed, and meticulous description of the *facts*, Marcuse observes, 'is the result of a series of abstractions from [their] *real concreteness*, which is in the universal character of the case.'[41]

From this ontological critique of the instrumental nature of scientific and technical reason, Marcuse derives some speculative and utopian consequences. However, as long as his attack against the process of formal abstraction with its bias towards domination implies a radical reform of both science and technique, his positive suggestions must be rejected. Towards the end of *One-Dimensional Man*, he suggests that science and technology should constitute themselves as 'political enterprise',[42] thus propounding a political intervention into the evolution of scientific-technological rationality. This suggestion, however, fails to recognize that science is intrinsically impermeable to external interference. Certainly, no one can rule out the possibility that scientific rationality develop a new methodology shrinking from abstract formalism, but, were such a development to occur, it would proceed from within science itself. What the political power can do instead is to radically transform the social environment so that new questions arise which may induce scientists to alter their categories of understanding of the world and, possibly, devise new theories.[43]

Nevertheless, the theoretical impossibility of prefiguring an alternative science does not preclude the possibility *hic et nunc* to develop a new technology. In this respect, Marcuse's suggestions can be far more fruitful. Taking for granted his critique of formal

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[41] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 110.
[42] Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ibid., p. 233.
[43] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", cit., pp. 250-251.

rationality, the erection of an alternative technology incorporating human values in its very structure requires the recovery of a dialectical conception of reality. To the extent that current technical practices fulfil the task of serving the most vital human needs, a new technology that wants to be liberating and emancipatory must assign to itself the additional task of serving other, higher human needs, namely, the need for freedom, justice, equality, happiness, and beauty. There is nothing deceivingly utopian in this requirement. As Feenberg explains, 'Marcuse's theory contains the means to construct a solution which avoids the excesses of both utopian technophobia and uncritical acceptance of given technology as a fate. Recall that the essential flaw in scientific-technical rationality, by which it is bound to biased application, lies in its reified decontextualization of the objects it constructs. Thus it should be possible to at least advance toward a new technology by multiplying the contexts and technical systems that interact in any given application to take into account more and more of the essential features of the object. The initial steps in this direction are obvious and concern the integration of ecological, medical, aesthetic, and work-democratic considerations into the existing technologies to begin the movement toward a better society. Thus just as technical practice now incorporates the requirements of domination in its basic structure, in a free society it would instead incorporate the requirements of peace and freedom.'[44]

The incorporation of a plurality of contexts of human needs into the structure and design of technical machines opens the way to what Feenberg calls in a Hegelian fashion the "concretization of technology". Through the realization of its integrative potential, technology is made to interact with a wide range of interests and action systems. To recognize this dialectical dimension of technology does not require a commitment to some kind of Aristotelian teleology or a special access to the notion of true human needs and potentialities. Technology, as a social and human enterprise, is inextricably linked to a variety of milieux. Marcuse shows that the way out of present technological reality is not to put boundaries on technical practices, but to recontextualize them into the "lifeworld". This means to install into the very structure of machines a new technical code informed with human and natural potentialities. How the transition from the present reified technological world to a future reintegrated technology is to be achieved is a practical and political question. The intent of this paper was to remove some conceptual and

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[44] Cf. A. Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology", cit., p. 253.

philosophical obstacles which seemed to be in the way of a critical theory of technology, and I think that Marcuse's and Feenberg's contributions demonstrate that this can be done without dumping reason, and scientific reason, into the dustbin of history.

9

CONCLUSION

The philosophical itinerary of my investigation into the idea of progress has moved from a genealogical analysis of this idea to arrive at the definition of a dialectical framework for technological progress. In undertaking an examination of the confrontation between Loewith and Blumenberg, I claimed that the idea of progress contains within its own semantic baggage a redeeming element which is not covered by Blumenberg's account of modernity in terms of human self-assertion. While considering as plausible Blumenberg's thesis that modernity represents a second overcoming of Gnosticism - that is, that modernity unfolds in terms of a historical process in which the destiny of the world is taken away from the inscrutable designs of God and placed within the reach of the human project of self-affirmation - I argued that Blumenberg's narrative can be justified only within a framework of philosophy of history. As a consequence, the semantic content implicit in the idea of progress is not exhausted by the circumstances of its emergence in the enterprises of physics and astronomy at the onset of the modern age, but implies a goal transcending the actual historical context of modernity. Loewith's claim that the idea of progress represents a secularization of the theological idea of salvation captures precisely the excess of meaning which goes missing in Blumenberg's analysis.

This eschatological element occupies a primary role even in the negative philosophies of history developed by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche's ideal of the overman as a synthesis of the master and slave types and Heidegger's envision of a postmodern age emerging from the overman's act of pushing forward to its most radical logical conclusions the world of technology reflect a dialectical tension operating at the core of the concept of progress. Yet, with Heidegger the phenomenon of technology as the essential characteristic of modern society becomes prominent. Technology, Heidegger explains, is not a tool in the hands of man to serve his purposes but a destiny, a way of life whose inner logic has taken over man's power of choice.

This substantive theory of technology seems to reproduce, at the culmination of modernity, that condition of hiddeness and imperscrutability of God articulated by the Gnostic doctrine which, according to Blumenberg, was overcome during the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity through the revaluation of the world. Thus, at this

stage, if Heidegger's apocalyptic vision of attributing quasi-divine powers to technology is correct, a kind of "third overcoming of Gnosticism" is needed.

However, while rejecting the neutrality of technology and partially embracing Heidegger's substantialism, Feenberg argues in his interpretation of Marcuse that the vast machinery which characterizes the modern world is not a mechanistic and deterministic order but contains internal tensions and contradictions which can be exploited by social forces to open a range of possible futures based upon a politics of technological transformation. Technology is neither neutral nor a destiny: it is not neutral because it is embedded with the values and interests of the dominant classes; it is not a destiny because it is a cultural product liable to a plurality of developments and civilizational alternatives. A fundamental ambivalence is inscribed in the technical codes according to which machines are designed and built up and this allows other possible rationalizations to be explored through a reconfiguration of human and technical resources.

In order to counter the danger of falling back into a condition of Gnostic fatalism, I argued that Marcuse's dialectical framework for technological progress accounts for the possibility of reorganizing modern industrial society by making its development conform to the demands of a wider range of values. A technical politics capable of keeping together political and technical considerations and of providing new criteria of innovation for technical development could seize upon the tensions in the industrial system 'to actualize ambivalent potentialities' so far suppresed by the dominant paradigm of rationality.

This utopian project of civilizational change does not involve a reform of science but requires a radical transformation of the relation between scientific enterprise, technological design, and social and political structure.Technology is not exclusive domain of a technically educated apparatus of managers and bureaucrats. In the current organization of society, it tends to clash with the dimension of communicative rationality because technical functions are undemocratically performed in disregard of common needs and interests. But a technical politics aimed at reconceptualizing the spheres of influence of all domains of life can subvert the operational autonomy of the specialized elites and subject their claims to power to democratic control.

Adorno's theory of negative dialectic and Habermas's theory of communicative action presuppose the unchallenged imperialism of formal and instrumental rationality and therefore relegate the task of philosophy to the spectatorial role of either criticizing

abstractly actual instances of progress or placing boundaries to technological imperatives. Neither of them, however, engages in the more positive enterprise of inventing a politics of technological transformation. I have argued instead that Marcuse's materialist-dialectical framework offers a feasible instrument for integrating the larger context of human needs and potentialities within the very structure of the rules and procedures of technological development. Now, whether the direction of progress should take a path in which human and technical elements are combined into a dialectical totality or should remain anchored to the level of instrumental rationality is a political choice. The practical implications involved in this choice have not been dealt with in the course of the thesis. Here, I have focused my attention on the more fundamental philosophical question of the possibility of progress through a confrontation of positive and negative philosophies of history. The question whether history displays progress is not an empirical but a normative one. It cannot be disconnected from the question of whether there should or should not be progress.

Although this statement may evoke a Kantian echo, it should be empasized that I have not pursued the search for transcendental grounds in order to legitimize the idea of progress. On the contrary, this study has been conducted in the Hegelian fashion of treating history according to the dialectical method. Since progress implies, as Marcuse claims, that the given state of affairs is negated and not continued, the philosophical categories of actuality and potentiality which Hegel employed for understanding history have imposed themselves without the chrism of arbitrariness.

In embracing Marcuse's dialectical framework to account for a technological transformation of the structures of society, I appeal to his concept of essence as a *historical category*. By 'essence', Marcuse refers to 'the totality of the social process as it is organized in a particular epoch'.[1] Essence is something which has become, the result of a process in which actual facts are transcended towards their own potentialities. The possibilities inherent in a particular historical situation are determined by the measure of control of nature, the degree of development of the productive forces, and the level of emancipation of human needs - 'the "free" needs for gratification and happiness, for the "good and beautiful"' - from the elementary stage of the reproduction of life.[2]

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[1] Cf. H. Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence", in *Negations*, cit., p. 70.

[2] Cf. H. Marcuse, ibid., p. 72.

However, in order to grasp the historical tendencies operating within a particular mode of social organization, Marcuse appeals to an account of the course of history as a whole. In his view, the projection of a historical goal embodying a more advanced form of social life must be made through a process of recollection of the past, that is by analyzing all aspects of the present form of life in their interconnected unity and by showing them as resulting from an entire sequence of historical appearences. This anchoring of the essential potentialities of a given historical situation to the concrete conditions of life preserves the dialectical method from the abstractness of utopian idealism.

The main claim of this thesis is that there is no theory of progress without a philosophy of history, that is without an overall account of the whole course of history. I have argued that Nietzsche, contrary to the most widespread interpretations of his thought, discerns a progressive directionality in the history of Western civilization leading from the decline of the master type to the affirmation of the overman, and that this development can be explained in dialectical terms. Heidegger, too, I have contended, speaks of a dialectical necessity implicit in the history of the forgetfulness of Being, in spite of his assumption that all historical epochs are mere manifestations of the play of chance of Being. What distinguishes, then, 'negative' from 'positive' philosophies of history - or, in other terms, critics and advocates of progress - does not lie in their different conceptions of time and history. Nietzsche, a presumed critic of progress, seems not to have rejected the idea of linear time, whereas Marcuse - at least the Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization*, an apologist of progress - embraces Hegel's dialectical model with his view of the culmination of the historical process as a return to the beginning.

In the ultimate analysis, it seems to me that the difference separating the two philosophies of history - the nihilistic and the utopian or, better, materialist-dialectical ones - resides in the different value judgements they attach to the course of history. There is nothing vaguely abstract in Nietzsche's narrative of the transition from the master type to the overman via the slave type. His philosophy of history is as much 'concrete' as Marcuse's. If he gives his preference to an individualist view of human emancipation, this is because of his fundamentally tragic conception of human existence. Of a different mould, instead, is Heidegger's narrative of modernity. There appears to be in his argument a theoretical flaw descending from his fatalistic conception of Being and I have described his account of the emergence of modernity as

utterly arbitrary. By contrast, Marcuse bestows a totally different ethical import upon the experience of domination of man upon man. For him, 'humanitarian and moral arguments are not merely deceitful ideology. Rather, they can and must become central social forces.'[3]

Marcuse's philosophical reflection shows that purely explanatory patterns accounting for the mechanisms which preside over historical change are not sufficient to legitimize the idea of progress. At bottom, insights into a better way of life transcending 'the bad current state of humanity' can find their truth only in historical action and in the struggle of humanity to overcome suffering. Habermas, in reporting a conversation he had with Marcuse a few days before his death on the normative basis of Critical Theory, remembers Marcuse as having told him: 'look, I know wherein our most basic value judgements are rooted - in compassion, in our sense for the suffering of the others.'[4]

No better place than human misery speaks of the necessity of a real fulfilment of human desires and potentialities.

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[3] Cf. J. Habermas, "Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity" in R.J. Bernstein (ed.), *Habermas and Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 66-77, p. 76.

[4] Cf. J. Habermas, ibid., p. 77.

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